

~~WITHDRAWN~~

**AT THE SUPREME
WAR COUNCIL**



MARSHAL FOCH

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AT THE SUPREME WAR COUNCIL

BY

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LATE ASSISTANT SECRETARY, SUPREME
WAR COUNCIL



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by

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

THOUGH it has hardly been detected by the many and hostile critics of this book, my main object in writing it was to establish the truth on a number of points: for a number of plain truths about the war had been obscured for the public, or rather never revealed to it, at all. Many of my views, here expressed, are, and perhaps always will be, debatable: for men always have, and always will, argue for ever about battles, and no estimate of a human character can be fixed or final. But there is one fact which is unshaken and unshakable, and which was no less a shock to the public than it had been to myself when it came to my knowledge. In this war we, the Allies, were big and our enemies small during almost the whole contest. Yet they held out for four years, and nearly won.

Now, with great deference, given my humble military rank, I find a moral in this, of great import to my own fellow-countrymen, and perhaps of

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tremendous import to their kinsmen in the United States. That moral is rather commonplace, like all morals, and it is that you cannot improvise in war: like all other vast practical enterprises it needs preparation to be successful. The Anglo-Saxons have never really believed this, and remained obstinately opposed to, and contemptuous of, military life. They are likely to be confirmed in their error by their success: for now the Teutonic and Slav rivals have collapsed, they stand almost as the pre-eminent race. If they can win wars without being military, it is hardly likely they will come to think that it is necessary to be military in order to win wars.

This little book aims at telling them that, in spite of a vast preponderance in numbers as well as in all other forms of military strength, they nearly lost. Reflecting sincerely, and, I hope, without immodesty, on the great British efforts, it seems to me that the evil of improvisation, and the advantage of preparation, do not lie on the surface, and cannot be easily detected. A nation of sportsmen and business men can rapidly create all that makes a great army, men, officers, material, and enthusiasm. One thing, however, cannot be created offhand and at will, but is the fruit of long

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efforts and the work of generations—command, great leaders, and the right conceptions of strategy. The greatest problem and practice we had ever given our Regular Army in Europe was handling four skeleton divisions at autumn manœuvres: we then required them to handle sixty real divisions on a real battle-field. It was like asking men employed to build cottages, suddenly to construct a cathedral. Hence the long duration of the war.

Paradoxical and unpalatable as this truth may be, my little book shows that the Allies ultimately won when they were weaker than their adversary, after failing to beat him for years during which they were much stronger: it also endeavours to show the simple reason, that they at last found the right method of command and the right commander, Foch. But Foch and Foch's 1918 battle is not the product of chance, any more than Michael Angelo or the Sistine frescoes are. He is the outcome of a long national effort, of a universal sacrifice to military life, of a passionate conviction that military command is one of the highest arts, of the devotion of the finest French minds to this profession, of the unspoken resolve of generations to be ready for this struggle. Only at this price can the military genius that decides the fate of

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nations be produced: and this idea, implicit in my book, and perhaps as disagreeable to most Americans as it is to most Englishmen, I offer to the serious consideration of the American public.

PETER E. WRIGHT.

May, 1921.

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AT THE
SUPREME WAR COUNCIL

I

FOUNDATION OF THE SUPREME
WAR COUNCIL

I

FOUNDATION OF THE SUPREME WAR COUNCIL

A WELL-KNOWN military writer, and a combatant in the Great War, Major Grasset,¹ has lately made a collection of extracts from the two great works of Foch, written more than twenty years ago, which are rather too voluminous for the ordinary reader, though even before the war curious inquirers, without the least direct interest in military affairs, had been attracted by books which treat war from such a philosophical height. These short extracts, published by Major Grasset in book form, reveal the fiery disposition and calculating brain which Foch always points out as the mark of a military leader. But prefaced to these extracts is a short study of the life of Foch. Now this is of unusual interest, because Major Grasset,

¹ *Precepts and Judgments of Marshal Foch*, by Major Grasset: translated by Hilaire Belloc. (Chapman & Hall.)

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from the text itself, has evidently obtained his information from the innermost circles of the French General Staff; some expressions, some phrases ring very like those of Foch himself: the resemblance can hardly be fortuitous. But, if not from Foch himself, then the information must come from the small group of officers who have always been immediately next to him while he was in any position of high command, for there are some facts, and especially some dates, which can only be known to this group. And as some of this information is new, and throws a new light on some of the great events in which our armies took part, and especially the battle of St. Quentin, it is of the highest interest. Having been at the Supreme War Council during the winter 1917-1918 as Assistant Secretary, I can tell at first hand and with numerical precision the events of that period which he relates at second hand and vaguely.¹

The world knows Foch only at the height of his achievements, when he drove the Germans before him, and would have destroyed them altogether had not his final and fatal blow been stopped by

¹ My authority for my statements has been questioned: a fuller description of my functions will be found in Appendix A.

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the armistice; it knows him at the moment of his success when his position was at its highest, but it knows little of him in adversity when he himself was at his greatest. This preface of Major Grasset's book tells us something, but not enough, of those earlier battles in which he rose, between August 4 and October 4, 1914, from the command of a corps to the command of an army group, and that the most important, and found himself, in the third month of the war, commanding the generals who had commanded him during the first month. During the first period of the war he was far greater than in the last, when the eyes of all the world were fixed on him; when he took all the tricks, but held all the cards. During the first period he held no cards at all, but won all the same. Then, as later, the words of the greatest of ancient historians, used by him of the man he admired most, are applicable to Foch. "He gave proof of a power and a penetration that was natural, wonderful, and infallible. When any crisis arose, however little he expected it, and without any examination, a view of the situation, far superior to that of any one else, sprang from him at once, and he predicted the subsequent course of events with no less certainty. His exposition of his own plans was most

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lucid; his criticism of other men's schemes consummate; and however incalculable the result might seem, he always knew what would succeed and what would not. In a word, uniting the deepest intellectual grasp with a lightning rapidity of decision, he was the model man of action."¹

Major Grasset gives us only a slight sketch of Foch's earlier feats.

At his second battle, the Trouée de Charmes in Lorraine, August 24, 1914, he and Dubail defended the line of the Meurthe against odds at least ten to one. The Marne was his third battle. On the last day of August he was put at the head of the Ninth Army by Marshal Joffre. This army was to hold the French centre in the first battle of the Marne, and it was against the centre that the main attack of the Germans was to be expected. Foch had 70,000 men: Von Bülow and Von Hausen, who attacked him (or, rather, who faced him, for he attacked them at once, as soon as they came within his reach on September 6), had 300,000 men. Thus the plan of the battle hung on whether Foch could hold these odds, while Maunoury and Lord French enveloped the German right; if the Germans could have rolled him over and cut the long Allied line

¹ *Thucydides*, i., ch. 138.

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from Verdun to Paris in two, they would not have been even endangered by this enveloping movement, for they would have destroyed most of the French armies. So the whole plan of the Marne hung on Foch. It was a speculation by Joffre that his lieutenant could win the odds of more than four to one. "Victory resides in will," writes Foch. "A battle won is a battle in which one has not admitted oneself defeated." Von Bülow's official report has been published, and we know that, for all his material superiority, he was a beaten man before the battle began. Twenty years before, his spiritually superior adversary, then Colonel Foch, had written: "Victory always comes to those who merit it by their greater strength of will and intelligence."

There are many sayings attributed to Foch at the Marne, but most of them are born of the French love for flowery rhetoric, not Foch's flinty, scientific brain, though, like flint, the hard impact of events can strike the brightest spark from it. There is one, however, which is not only true, but very like him. On the last day of the battle, as he watched the Germans come on for the seventh time to the attack of Mondement, the key of the French position, which the Prussian Guard had taken time after

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time, only to lose it again every time Foch counter-attacked, he said cheerfully to his staff: "Well, gentlemen, they must be in great straits somewhere or other if they are in such a desperate hurry here." He had divined rightly: Maunoury was creeping behind Von Kluck, and Franchet d'Esperey behind Von Bülow and Von Hausen, and Foch, as he guessed, only had to cling on for a few more hours to be safe. The Germans did finally pierce the French centre by the capture of La Fère Champenoise on the last day of the battle; but Foch, though he had no reserves of any kind left, would not concede it. He took the 42nd Division out of the line, risked leaving a gap in the French front, and stormed La Fère just as the Germans were sitting down to dinner, thinking the battle was over and won.

Foch had only one week between the first and seventh of September to inspire the Ninth Army, largely composed of defeated and retreating troops, with his determination in that desperate struggle. Almost at once he was given something still more difficult to do, and he took up this fourth command even more swiftly. In the beginning of October the fall of Antwerp, the fortress which protected the whole of the Allies' left flank, was suddenly

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seen to be imminent, and another catastrophe impending. Joffre immediately turned to Foch. Late in the evening on October 4, Foch, who was at Chalons, was told over the telephone that he had been appointed commander of the north-western army group. He left Chalons at ten o'clock in the night. Between four and six o'clock next morning he had given their instructions to his army commanders, and at nine o'clock was directing the furious battle raging round Lens. M. Poincaré said in the speech he made on Foch's admission to the Academy that it was his view, single and alone among those of all the Allied commanders, that the British, few in number and battle-worn as they were, could still hold Ypres, that gave our troops the chance of winning the first battle of Ypres, the crowning victory of 1914, the glorious year of the war for both the Allies. This was the Foch of 1914.

But subsequent years of the war are far less creditable to the Allies than 1914, for never again during the remaining four years of the war, except for six months in 1918, were the Central Powers to be superior on the Western European front, and that superiority not only short, but slight; and during that period in 1918, the Germans very nearly won the war. The Entente were brought to

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the edge of defeat by disregarding the advice of Foch, and again saved by him. We can never justly allot the merit of winning the war, or learn the errors that prevented us gaining it far earlier, or profit by the lessons of the struggle, unless we make the effort to discard our vanity and understand the truth. For struggle there will be gain in the future, if not in the immediate present; the evil of war is too inherent to be extirpated by the new, fashionable, but delusive ideas with which some hope to cut it out.

For a period that can almost be called of years the British and French were more than 7 to 4 to the Germans in men on the Western front, and almost double in material. In January, 1917, the Allies had 178 divisions on the French front to the German 127, which, allowing for the smaller size of the German division, gives more than the proportion mentioned.

The dissolution of the Russian army which began after the Revolution went on rapidly during 1917. But in May, 1916, the Russians had had along their European front 140 divisions of infantry—each division half as great again as a German division, and a quarter as great again as an Austrian—and 33½ divisions of cavalry. One portion of this vast

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army, known as the Northern group, had consisted of 45 infantry divisions and 13 cavalry divisions. This Northern group had sunk, in January, 1918, to 175,000 men all told, of which 15,000 only were in the fighting line; and the rest of the Russian armies had shrunk in the same proportion. At one railroad point during the winter, 10,000 deserters had been counted daily going home; and this collapse left the Roumanian army with a fighting strength of 18 infantry, and 2 cavalry divisions exposed, unprotected, and helpless, and eventually driven to submission; the same army which, after the defeat of 1916, had sufficiently recovered themselves to inflict a severe defeat on the Germans in 1917. So towards the end of 1917 both Russia and Roumania could be taken as out of it. The new ally, America, had hardly begun to come in—in December, 1917, there were only $3\frac{1}{2}$ American divisions in France, each of them being, however, two or three times as big as a German division. But in the interval between the exit of Russia, an empire of more than 160 million people, and the entrance of America, a country of more than 100 millions, the Allies were compelled to carry on the war with diminished forces. This question, therefore, naturally put itself to their statesmen, whether or not they could

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get through this difficult interval. The Germans might be strong enough to snatch a victory during this period of our weakness, in which case it was the duty of our statesmen to make peace while still undefeated; or, on the contrary, we might be able to resist them till the weight of the Americans inclined the balance in their favour, in which case it was their duty to resist till that moment. Though no peace negotiations were ever contemplated, they took stock of their resources.

The course to be steered towards the end of 1917 depended upon obtaining as accurate a calculation as possible of the enemy's forces, and of their own, leaving out of account Russia and America. To the making of this calculation a War Cabinet Committee applied itself, concentrating all the figures obtainable by the information branches of all the Allies. This Committee on Man Power, whose conclusions were to govern the Allied policy, reckoned these were the forces of the adversaries.

The combatant strength (not the ration strength) of the British and the French in all the existing theatres of war—in France, Italy, the Balkans, Palestine, and Mesopotamia—was 3,700,000 (three million, seven hundred thousand) men; the combatant strength of the Germans in all theatres, in-

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cluding the Russian and Roumanian was 3,400,000, (three million, four hundred thousand) men. Therefore Britain and France alone in December, 1917, were, and had been for two years, numerically stronger than Germany.

The total of the combatant Allied forces—British, French, Italian, Belgian, Portuguese, Serbian, Greek, and including 85,000 Americans—was, in December, 1917, 5,400,000 (five million, four hundred thousand) men. There were no Russians or Roumanians reckoned in. But the total of the Central Powers—German, Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Turkish—was only 5,200,000 (five million, two hundred thousand) men. This included more than $1\frac{3}{4}$ millions who were still on the Russian and Roumanian front.¹

The arrival of these last on any theatre might create a momentary risk for the Allies, though they would still have had a total superiority, but, till that transference took place, their number on every theatre, in December, 1917, was higher. In the Turkish lands the Allies were as six to five to their opponents; in the Balkans as four to three; in Italy

¹ The historian can find these and the following totals at the end of the report of the Committee on Man Power, in the archives of the War Cabinet.

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as thirteen to eight; in France still very nearly six to four. On the Western front, properly understood, stretching from the North Sea to the Adriatic, the number of their field guns were six to five of the enemy, and their heavy guns as seven to six. Everywhere the advantage of numbers, whether considered together, or, at that date, in any particular place, was theirs.

How much more, and how crushing, had their superiority been when more than 190 (one hundred and ninety) Russian and Roumanian divisions—a body of men far more numerous than the whole German army—were fighting on their side; yet they had failed to win the war.

The plan of the Allied statesmen, perhaps indeed because of their great advantage in numbers, had been to hope for the best. Now enemy reinforcements of one million bayonets might appear on any of their fronts; for German and Austrian divisions had begun to stream westwards. But the plan of all of them—except one, Mr. Lloyd George—was still to hope for the best, till the arrival of the Americans decided the war. Even M. Clemenceau, the least inert of men, was of this opinion, and in January, 1918, told the assembled military and political leaders of the alliance, that the date of

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victory would be the autumn of 1919, for then the American strength would be at its height. But this American giant, though he intended to put forth all his strength, only bestirred himself slowly. When M. Clemenceau uttered this prognostic there were $4\frac{1}{2}$ American divisions in France, huge American divisions, much bigger than any European; but only one of these was in the line, and the American Chief of the Staff could then only promise that there would be four fully trained by July, 1918, eight in October, 1918, and twenty in April, 1919.

This was the assistance which General Bliss in January, 1918, was promising to the Allies; but it would not be fair to the Americans to omit saying they ultimately gave much more after the misfortunes of the spring. Both the dispatch and the training of troops was then accelerated. In January, when this estimate was given, there were $4\frac{1}{2}$ American divisions in France, of which one only was trained and in the line. In June, 1918, there were 17 in France, of which 7 were trained. On November 1, 1918, there were 41 American divisions in France and Italy, of which 29 were trained, and had taken over more than 70 miles of front, thus enabling Foch to mass the bulk of the French

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forces on the upper Moselle for the death-blow; but for the Armistice, Castelnau, at the head of three French armies, would have burst into the Rhine valley, and placed himself between Germany and the exhausted German armies who were still being hammered far away west of the Meuse, and Sedan would indeed have been avenged. On Armistice day there were rather more Americans than British on the continent on the Western Front, although the rifle strength of the trained American troops was about half our own.

The one statesman who had refused to resign himself to this policy, or this absence of policy, was Mr. Lloyd George.

Immediately on coming into power he had invented a new instrument of government, the War Cabinet. This body of four, sitting continuously and issuing orders to all the ministries through its Secretary, was virtually a dictatorship, and in effect a personal dictatorship; and though this is as yet unperceived, this concentration of power in the one office of the Prime Minister has to some degree survived the war; for it is the existence of a Secretariat, both in the War Cabinet and the larger cabinet, innovation as it is, that makes him almost absolute.

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For in both these small executive bodies there are no fixed rules of procedure or methods of voting like, for example, at a Board of Directors. In the War Cabinet, and apparently in the Cabinet that has succeeded it, both the settlement of their agenda, and, what is still more important, the formulation of their decision, was left in the hands of the Secretary, largely owing to his skill and indefatigable industry. The Secretary, therefore, without having any wish to do so, must to some extent affect their decisions, especially as in many or most of their discussions what was their real decision remains very doubtful.

It happens that the only holder there has so far been of this post has acted as the assiduous attendant of the Prime Minister, so that the War Cabinet's Secretariat was very much in effect the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Through this Secretary, and perhaps without any design, but by the natural adoption of so great a convenience, the will of the Prime Minister tended to be the will of the War Cabinet. This growth of the Prime Minister's office (to which other causes contributed, such as the selection by him of ministers who had never been in the House of Commons, and who, therefore, could only consider themselves as chosen by him

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alone) is the great constitutional change of the war. It tends to make the office more and more like an American president, absolute, but subject to selection every four years. Whatever its defects and merits in peace, it is only with this authority for immediate and uncontrolled command that the war could really be carried on. In war, the Prime Minister during the whole day was like a swimmer in rough seas—one question after another, like charging waves, and no sooner was one breasted than another came rolling on, and every question requiring a decision without delay, when it was always better to risk taking action wrongly than not to act at all.

This creation of a central and supreme authority had averted the dangers of 1917. We had passed from one extreme to another. There was a helmsman, who, if pluck and energy are the qualities most needed by the pilot who is to weather the storm, has no equal in these virtues, still less a superior, in the whole history of our Parliament, which, by a singular piece of good fortune, produced him just when we needed him most; the very opposite in this respect of the weak and wavering Mr. Asquith. And there was a new helm of a new pattern, to which the whole ship answered at a

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touch. The threat of starvation made by the U-boats, the great danger of 1917, had now been averted by the rapid and innumerable edicts of the War Cabinet, which in one year had almost transformed our social system. If unity of command had done so much at home, it was natural for Mr. Lloyd George to think that it might be no less effective abroad.

For the war did not present itself to the national leaders of the Alliance in the same shape as to the public, which entertained, and still entertains, the flattering idea that we had been struggling against immense odds. This was one of the many fictions with which it had always been considered necessary to drug the nation, though their devotion always had been equal to any sacrifice, and their fortitude to any deprivation; but the truth was, and could not appear as anything else to the leaders, that we were big and our adversaries small. For years the Germans had stood at bay, surrounded by more numerous enemies, who had failed to overcome them.

It therefore might be considered that the Allied policy had been wrong. Mr. Lloyd George thought so and said so, though the other leaders sitting round the table might be satisfied to

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wait until the knot untied itself instead of trying to untie it.

There was a remarkable likeness between the three Premiers—Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Orlando. They all three united in themselves absolutely contrary qualities. Eloquent men have unguarded, unsuspecting, impulsive temperaments, and cunning men are inarticulate and ineloquent. But they all three were both incunng and eloquent, and the conjunction of these opposites is probably what makes a great parliamentarian, as they all three were. This is perhaps why he is so rare. Suspicious and circuitous in their dealings, the most persuasive and real rhetoric, that struggles to convince and win, quite unlike the vapid speech of formal public utterance, gushed from them at once.

But the British statesman (and Lord Milner was the complement of Lloyd George, as if provided by nature to supply the natural deficiencies of the Prime Minister) surpassed all the others both in will and insight; in will, because they were resolved to seize and mould coming events, and not wait timidly on their occurrence; in insight, because they could see the whole interests of the Alliance as well as the British national interest. The French statesmen were, without exception, jour-



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GENERAL GOUGH

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nalists, and far better at discussing than doing. Clemenceau was the most amiable of old men, and, if a tiger, as he was called, only a stuffed nursery tiger, more endearing than formidable. But, always quivering with patriotic emotion, he was all haste and impulse, and would apply to a knot neither the patient understanding nor steady perseverance without which it could not be unravelled. In the minds of almost every one sitting round the red baize table at Versailles, the uppermost thought was the security of their own place and the advantage of their own country. This was transparent as soon as they opened their mouths. But the uppermost thought in Mr. Lloyd George's mind was to find the way out and take it and win the war, whatever he risked. In spite of his oblique and subterranean methods; his inveterate taste for low and unscrupulous men; of the distrust felt for him by his favourites, even at the height of their favour; of his superficial, slipshod, and hasty mind; this determination of character made him, without any assumption on his part, the leader of the Alliance. The half-deified chiefs, whom the prostrate Germans worshipped as idols, never ceased to proclaim what magniloquently they called their will to victory. But none of them ever had it

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like this little Welsh lay preacher and attorney, who remained so deeply stamped with the characteristics of these early occupations, even at this sublime elevation of power.

Now that the Russians and Roumanians were out, or going out, the Germans were sure to be equal again on the West, and during the summer of 1918 to be rather bigger.

In January, 1917, there had been 127 German divisions in France; in December, 1917, there were 151; in January, 1918, 158. It was like watching a river rise, which rises only inch by inch, but which may, after a certain level, flood and sweep away everything. After keeping off so many enemies at such a great disadvantage, the Germans might hope to overcome them now the advantage lay on their side. For while in January, 1917, the Allies had had 178 divisions in France, in December, 1917, they had only 169.

Ludendorff felt certain that with equal numbers he could win the war in the West, and that winter he told the main committee of the Reichstag that the odds were 3 to 1 on him. This assertion must have been genuine, for he never could have imposed another effort on the Germans, exhausted as they were with the desperate struggle of three

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years' war on so many fronts, against so many opponents, had he had any doubt of the result. About the same time the extent of this exhaustion was disclosed at those secret meetings of the States of the Hapsburg monarchy, in which they discussed their foreign policy, known as the Delegations. The question being whether and how to continue the war, the Delegations were told what were the losses of the Central Powers. But some of the members of the Delegations were Poles, who, as a partitioned people, had a foot in each camp. Through this leak the information reached the Allies.¹

The Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose population at the outbreak of the war may be perhaps placed at 55 million, had had 10,300,000 (ten million, three hundred thousand) men of military age. Of these, 7,600,000 (seven million, six hundred thousand) had become casualties.

The German Empire, whose population at the outbreak of war may perhaps be placed at about 70 million, had had 14 million men of military age, of which 12,600,000 (twelve million, six hundred

¹ The historian can find this information and these figures in a Foreign Office telegram, from Mr. Lindley, Petrograd, number 529, and dated Feb. 27, 1918.

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thousand) had been passed fit for military service, out of whom 7,700,000 (seven million, seven hundred thousand) had become casualties.

So, in rough proportions, the Central Empires turned a fifth of their population into soldiers, and had had a tenth of them killed, hurt, or lost in three years. These figures, if right, give a basis for an exact calculation how much wider the suffering of a modern war is than it used to be in the eighteenth century. Gibbon laid it down¹ that the highest proportion of soldiers that a civilised state could maintain was one hundredth of its population. But in the twentieth century that proportion had risen to a fifth. Thus the circle of those exposed to the dangers and pains of war had been enlarged twenty times by our increased means of accumulating and producing wealth.

In the autumn of 1917, a last and desperate attempt of the Central Powers to win the war in the ensuing nine months was to be anticipated. Mr. Lloyd George had come to doubt more and more whether the system of the Allies, which since 1914 had yielded nothing but failure and disaster, could meet this attack; if it failed when superior in numbers, it was hardly likely to succeed

¹ *Decline and Fall*, Chap. v., opening sentences.

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when inferior. During the whole of 1917 he and Lord Milner had accepted the military adviser bequeathed to them by Mr. Asquith—General Robertson.

He was a great administrator, with the great qualities this implies. Lord Kitchener had been a great symbol of our greatness, with a terrible light of African victories, Khartoum and the Vaal, playing round his head, a name to awe our enemies and cheer us in the conflict; but he was not successful as an organiser, contrary to common opinion. Being elderly, he naturally kept unchanged the habits of his whole life, spent with small Eastern and African armies, where he could and did do everything by himself. This method of work he applied to the large national armies he was raising, and so called into being a vast, and almost unfathomable, administrative chaos. This chaos General Robertson had reduced to shape and order; but his peculiar ability, which had raised him to the highest rank, after his start at the lowest, had been acquired and exercised chiefly in Administration and Intelligence. His attainments in this sphere could be no other than very exceptional to lift him so high in an army like ours, where social advantages push on, and social disabilities hold

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back, so very much; but the absence of an early liberal education deprived him of one of the few qualities (if not the only one) which early education can confer, flexibility of mind. General Robertson's plan, and he had no other, was to raise and train more men; in fact, to do the thing he was so very capable of doing. If the two sides were allowed to go on killing each other in France indefinitely, when all the Germans were dead there would still be a few Allies left, and they would win. This was his simple strategy, as far as can be gathered from his memoranda to the War Cabinet, to which the future historian of the war is earnestly referred. He reveals himself in them, as every one must reveal himself who sets his pen to paper, and shows a mind keen and quick in the highest degree, but narrow, and obstinately entrenched in its own narrowness; on questions of military operations, too, not only unreliable and mistaken, but evidently not at his ease at all with that kind of subject. These memoranda reply to the inquiries of Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Milner for advice with sullen reluctance, as if they were meddling in what did not concern them.

Robertson's military ideas are to be found, far more tellingly expressed than in his own memo-

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randa, in the contributions to the Press, of the writer whom we know now to have been his mouthpiece.¹ He rejected unity of command as a "radical, untimely, dangerous" change. The right strategy was raising sixty more divisions, in addition to the seventy odd we already possessed, and "wearing the Germans down."² This was the point of difference between him and the War Cabinet, who hesitated at loading us (who already bore almost the whole naval and financial burden of the war) with an army almost as great as the Germans, and who presumed to think there might exist a less primitive strategy, especially as the Allies had long had an overwhelming preponderance in numbers over the Central Powers, without attaining to any result.

On such an adviser the War Cabinet had had to rely for advice, not only as to the conduct of operations on vast and various fields, but on subjects which were as much political as military, and required the judgment of a statesman as much as that of a soldier. They had endured his covert opposition, which we now know was backed with incessant

¹ See Appendix A. The relations between General Robertson, General Maurice, and Colonel Repington.

² The *Times*, Dec. 18, 1917; Nov. 24, 1917; May 8, 1917; Aug. 11, 1917.

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intrigue in the Press,¹ for a whole year, and the yields of his policy, compared with its expenditure during that year, did not seem to recommend itself. The following figures, strictly speaking, are casualties on all fronts; but all except a small fraction were incurred in France.

The Somme (July to November, inclusive, 1916) had cost us 22,923 (twenty-two thousand, nine hundred and twenty-three) officers, and 476,553 (four hundred and seventy-six thousand, five hundred and fifty-three) men.² In 1917, the Arras offensive (April and May) gave us casualties of 9657 (nine thousand, six hundred and fifty-seven) officers, and 186,453 (one hundred and eighty-six thousand, four hundred and fifty-three) men; but some ground was gained. In Flanders, at Paschendaele and other places, and at Cambrai (June to December, inclusive, 1917) we had got little or nothing for casualties of 26,459 (twenty-six thousand, four hundred and fifty-nine) officers, and 428,004 (four hundred and twenty-eight thousand and four) men in seven months. The two big battles of the year 1917 had cost us altogether the

¹ See Appendix A, for the evidence.

² The historian will find these figures in the great Statistical Abstract of the War, in the Archives of the War Office.

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huge amount of 36,116 (thirty-six thousand, one hundred and sixteen) officers, and 614,457 (six hundred and fourteen thousand, four hundred and fifty-seven) men.

Even at first sight the yield, next to the expense, seems slender. On closer view it seems worse still. This more exact view can perhaps be got by making two comparisons, one with the cost of our last victorious advance in 1918, and the other with the cost of a corresponding French attack.

Our victorious advance in 1918 carried our armies from a desperate situation, where they were pinned against the Channel ports and the Somme estuary, within reach of Germany, almost at one bound. From August to November, 1918, inclusive, our outgoings were 17,426 (seventeen thousand, four hundred and twenty-six) officers and 340,745 (three hundred and forty thousand, seven hundred and forty-five) men in casualties.

Foch's hundred days' battle and real victory cost us three-quarters of what the paper successes of Flanders battle in 1917, or of the Somme in 1916 had cost us.

But a better comparison still is with corresponding French expenses. Our Arras battle of the spring, 1917, which was successful, corresponded

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with a French attack at the Chemin des Dames, on a far grander scale, with a mass of manoeuvre, Nivelle's Armée de Rupture, equal to our whole army, which failed in a determined attempt to break the German line. After this failure a great body of French troops revolted at Soissons—the greatest rebellion in the war on our side—and proclaimed they would no longer obey orders to go into such "butchery,"¹ and after this Foch and Pétain gave them a rest from big battles during that year. But Nivelle's casualties had only been 107,000 (one hundred and seven thousand).

No belligerent, in my opinion, not even the almost unarmed Russian masses, to whom the German communiqués (the real communiqués, not those given to us), always refer in the same way as they do to us, "the English masses," were ever slaughtered at the same profuse rate as we were, though our dogged, dauntless, and devoted armies were the only belligerent armies who at no time in the war ever showed any signs of rebellion or dissolution, and I base my opinion on the following two sets of figures.

Every front, compared to the French front, was

¹ The cry of the French mutineers was, "A bas la guerre! plus de boucherie."

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relatively safe; out of every nine men who went to France five became casualties. Therefore the chance of escape was less than an even chance; but at Salonika, the safest front, only 1 in 21 became casualties. Thus it was 20 to 1 against being killed or hurt in the Balkans, apart from disease; it was 15 to 1 in Egypt, and 25 to 4 in Mesopotamia.¹ In France, too, were concentrated the great bulk of our forces, three-quarters or two-thirds of the whole of our forces overseas. Therefore our losses were almost all losses in France.

The great national armies which we raised only really began to fight on the Somme; the first month's casualties at the Somme (July, 1916) gave about the same total as the casualties of all the previous big battles put together. So, roughly speaking, our national armies fought for little more than half the time that the far greater French national armies, half as big again, fought on their own soil, yet the final total of killed and missing (not casualties) suffered by our forces in the war is little less than the French total. In hundreds of thousands it is 11 (eleven) to their 13 (thirteen).

The published German official figures for killed

¹ The historian can find these figures in the Statistical Abstract of the War, in the Archives of the War Office.

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and missing is 17 in the same units. This is too low to be credible; other figures similarly published, like the number of German prisoners, can be checked and are a good deal below the real figure, it may therefore be taken that this figure 17 is below the real figure. But even if a large addition is made to it, as the discount of official misrepresentation, the German rate of loss must have been far smaller than the Allied rate, if their double front, far more restricted resources, far smaller numbers, and far more numerous battles and campaigns are taken into account. Such is the advantage in human lives gained by previous preparation, however wicked, and the price paid for improvisation, however wonderful, in war.

Before the war the Director of Military Operations at Army Headquarters had been Sir Henry Wilson, and in the natural course of events the position of Chief of the Imperial General Staff, held by General Robertson, would have come to him; but he had been passed over, in spite of his high reputation, by Mr. Asquith, who condemned the part he had played at the War Office during the Irish crisis of 1914. For under a ponderous manner and a portentous phraseology Mr. Asquith concealed a capricious petulance; but so much do

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appearances govern the world that a pompous exterior is sufficient to keep a reputation for deliberate judgment and weighty prudence. Sir Henry had predicted and prepared for this war all his life. He had been over this ground on which it was to be fought time after time on his bicycle, and, for example, had chosen the billets our Headquarters were to occupy in one place during the Mons retreat long before the war. Whatever his value as an officer commanding in the field, of which only a professional can judge, he was far superior to any British general officer who ever attended the Supreme War Council in intelligence and imagination, of which any man can judge. Perhaps, indeed, his native brilliance and effervescent Irish gaiety were too great not to damage him in the eyes of the sound but rather stolid sportsman, the British Regular. He was not only diplomatic but diplomatic to excess. But this very fault was his greatest advantage. For we have always been compelled to fight our continental wars in co-operation with or by means of the troops of other nations, and our great leaders, like Marlborough or Wellington, had to be diplomats as well as strategists. Their part has always been to unit and guide the troops of various nations through or with whom we have

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always acted. Any one present at the debates of the Supreme War Council, whether civil or military, became at once aware why only an Englishman could give the Alliance as a whole a true direction; it was because England was uninvaded. None of our Allies could take a general view. The occupations of their soil by the Germans really frenzied them, and prevented them seeing anything else. It was pitiful to see their rage at the thought. No doubt we should not have been otherwise had we known that in Kent and Norfolk young women, or even little girls in their teens, were being outraged by gross German brutes. One village in their country was more to them than empires in the East. "If only," Sir Henry Wilson used to exclaim in mock despair, "if only we could make the French understand where Mesopotamia is." The sea, also, was as unintelligible to them as the rest of the world was unimportant. The French generals, superb as was their conception of *la grande guerre* in European fields, and dazzling beyond belief their exposition of it, seemed to have gained this intensely professional (and therefore perhaps necessarily narrow) capacity by excluding everything else from their minds. They spoke of the sea as if it was a smooth, flat, and safe surface along which

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divisions and their supplies could be moved about as draughts are across a draught-board. Yet half the questions arising had a naval complication. Half the debates ended on a phrase, which, like a stupid joke in a pantomime, became amusing by its mere recurrence. This phrase was "C'est toujours une question de tonnage," which Sir Henry used to guffaw in his John Bull French. But an English soldier-statesman like Sir Henry could not but understand both the East and the sea, because they had always been the main factors in all his problems. Sir Henry had all the merits if he had some of the defects of his idiosyncrasy; he was urbane, adroit, unalterably patient, and endlessly painstaking in the pursuit of his ends, which he followed with coiling, serpentine vigilance. So well did he understand and manage the French, that in 1917 the French Government had formally stipulated in their written agreements that he should be the liaison officer between the two armies.¹ They never forgot the dexterity with which he composed the dispute between Lord French and Gallieni in the hours before the Marne, when a quarrel might have been disastrous. For

¹ See M. Briand's despatch quoted in Appendix B, "Unity of Command in 1917."

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though not good at French, he understood something far more difficult than their language, the free, violent, rhetorical modes of speech used by Latins, always baffling, usually shocking, and sometimes exasperating to grave, contained, romantic northerners. His Irish ebullience was as much to their taste as it had always been disconcerting to his fellow officers. He came into Clemenceau's room one morning the press had been criticising Clemenceau's age, snatched him up, and whirled him dancing round the room till the old man's black indoor skull-cap fell off, "just," he said, "to show them how young we really are." In a debate he knew very well how to use their predilection for a jest, and promptness to laugh. He had a singular gift of seeing things, persons, or situations in a simple and direct way, and expressing his views with brevity and clearness; the short and lucid logic of his memoranda for the War Cabinet, to which the historian is again referred, constitute models, either as advice or orders. It is sad to think that both he and Foch, who had devoted—perhaps in the case of Foch one may say consecrated—their lives to a preparation for this great struggle, were—Wilson in spite of his accomplishments, and Foch in spite of his achievements—



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MAJOR-GENERAL SIR FREDERICK B. MAURICE

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kept in subordinate positions and minor tasks till its fourth year, when, by the will of Mr. Lloyd George, taking charge of our affairs at their very worst, all our advantages having been wasted or thrown away, they yet ended in a few months an apparently interminable contest.

General Wilson, in effect, maintained—

“The fault of the Allies’ system has always been that there was no system at all; their political has never been adjusted to their military action; if it had been, Bulgaria might in 1915 have been made to come in on our side. Their military action has not been connected; if it had been, the intervention of Roumania in 1916 might have been decisive.

“If the war had been directed by a central and supreme body, co-ordinating political with military effort, and army with army, instead of these being connected by temporary arrangements, missions, liaisons, the Central Powers would have succumbed long ago. But the absence of unity, for want of which we have failed to attain victory, is now going to give it to them. They have now one instead of two fronts, and free on the East, they are going to throw their whole weight on the West. That front, which, from the North Sea to the Adriatic, forms a single front, has never been treated as such.

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It is just possible for the British, French, and Italian armies to act separately when on the offensive, as they have been most of the time. But now they will have, till the Americans arrive in force, to stand on the defensive. The armies of the Central Powers will crush each separately, unless there is a single central command to give the whole strength of the other two Allied armies, at once, and with no delay, to the third."

These prognostics were too soon justified. As Major Grasset says, "the thunderbolt fell without so much as the warning of the lightning flash."

On October 25, 1917, the Germans broke through the Italian front at Caporetto, and in the ensuing retreat General Cadorna lost a quarter of a million men in casualties and a quarter of a million men in prisoners. His army almost entirely dissolved. So the first German offensive in the West had almost destroyed the Italian army.

Foch was then Chief of the French General Staff, having been called back in the spring of 1917—after Nivelle's failure—from his retirement. For retired in 1916, he had been given, as Major Grasset tells us, the special task of planning the defence of Switzerland. As soon as the Russian Revolution had taken place, and a prospect of a

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German offensive in the West therefore appeared, the Swiss Government (so small was their faith in German professions) had anticipated that the Central Powers would violate its neutrality in order to turn the Allied right in France. Foch had produced a plan, exquisite in its subtle simplicity, by which the troops of the Swiss confederation, after acting as covering troops, would have retired to the central, inexpugnable *massif* of their country, while fifty French divisions would have caught in flank the German armies pouring through the flat corridor of the Aar Valley, too narrow for them either to deploy or retreat, while the Swiss army hung on the other flank. This famous plan is known as "Le plan H."¹ An apprehension about Switzerland, sharpened perhaps by the memory of the French mistake about Belgium in 1914, never left the minds of Foch and Pétain and affected all their dispositions in the winter 1917-1918, as those dispositions themselves show.

But the blow fell in Italy, not Switzerland. Within twenty-four hours of hearing the news of the break through, Foch had begun entraining French troops to go to Cadorna's help; six French followed

¹ The historian can find an abstract of it in the Registry at Versailles.

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by five English divisions had hurried there. Even with this assistance Cadorna intended abandoning the line of the Piave, fearing the position could be turned from the Alps, and retreating to the line of the Mincio. Foch hastened to his headquarters and, as Major Grasset politely puts it, "persuaded Cadorna that he had not suffered definite defeat, and that the enemy could be checked on the Piave." Foch really bullied him so that he thought it preferable to stand and face the Austrians than retreat and face Foch. Had Foch's decision not been so rapid, for he had given orders for the French divisions to be moved towards Italy before Cadorna asked for help, the line of the Piave would certainly not have been retained. But the next line, that of the Mincio, gave a very long front to the Italians, instead of the short line of the Piave from the Alps to the sea. As Cadorna was never tired of repeating when he went to Versailles, not eleven, but twenty or thirty Anglo-French divisions would have been required to hold the line of the Mincio. This would have been so serious a diminution of the Anglo-French forces in France, that it might have seemed preferable to abandon the Italians altogether. Only Foch's promptitude prevented Caporetto from being a blow fatal to Italy.

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Foch insists in his *Principles of War* that a battle is a "crisis," a "swift and bloody drama." But in his ordinary language and unconsciously, he always uses a word that is even more expressive of his conception of the pace at which the events of a battle proceed and the consequent necessity of quick decision. He never says a battle "begins," he always says, rather strangely, "a battle is off," using the word properly applicable to horses starting in a race ("une fois la bataille partie").

But it is some of the subsequent discussions that took place between Foch and Cadorna that show the faults of the Allied system more than the battle itself. The eleven Anglo-French divisions in Italy were a definite diminution of the Allied forces in France, but they were a definite loss only because of the insufficient railroad communication between France and Italy.

So defective were these that some of the French divisions coming to the help of Cadorna had had to cross the Alps on foot, or else they would have arrived too late. When the whole Western front was treated as one, this defect was evident at once; an indefinite number of Italian divisions could have come to France, or Anglo-French divisions to Italy, if the railroad communication had been improved

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sufficiently to shift them back again shuttle-wise whenever and wherever they were wanted. A few weeks before the 1918 campaign began it was too late to start construction. Whenever Weygand, Foch's Chief of the Staff, and Cadorna at Versailles, discussed the subject at the meetings of the Military Representatives, they used to lament and shrug and sigh over its being too late.¹ But if a central military organ of command for the whole front between the North Sea and the Adriatic had existed before, the necessity for the improvement would have appeared as soon as they started discussing, and it could easily have been carried out in the early part of the war.

Caporetto decided Mr. Lloyd George; at a Conference held at Rapallo in the beginning of November, the Supreme War Council was founded as a central directing political body for the whole alliance; it was a monthly meeting of the principal ministers of each country at Versailles. There was a permanent staff of Military Representatives at that place to act as their military advisers, and to

¹ I speak from personal knowledge: it gradually became my duty to act as sole interpreter to the Military Representatives at their formal meetings, as well as being a member of the joint inter-Allied Secretariat.

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co-ordinate the action of all the Allied forces. These military advisers were Sir Henry Wilson; Weygand, Chief of the Staff to Foch in Paris; General Cadorna; and later General Bliss, American Chief of the Staff. "This," as Major Grasset says, "was a hesitating but not less decisive step towards unity in command."

II

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THE Supreme War Council, at their December Session, directed all commanders of all Allied armies and staffs to give the Military Representatives all possible information. A constant liaison between all the main centres of the war and Versailles was established; for example, a permanent telephonic communication with the War Cabinet and with G.H.Q. From all these quarters information came pouring into Versailles without cessation.¹ During December and January a number of inter-Allied questions of great importance were referred to it which the Military Representatives decided by means of joint notes, signed by all of them, and presented to their respective Governments. They

¹ Again I speak from personal knowledge. I was the first Allied officer—after the French Camp Commandant—to get into the building assigned to the Supreme War Council and, owing to my dual position of secretary and interpreter, was busily employed in this organization.

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turned out these joint notes at the rate of two or three a week. But the main plans elaborated between Foch and Sir Henry Wilson at Versailles can be better understood if the forces in opposition, as they were to be between the middle and the end of February, 1918, when the fighting was expected to begin, are known.

By the flow of divisions from the East, the Germans in France then had 178 divisions, estimated at 1630 battalions, 1,232,000 rifles, and 24,000 sabres; 8800 field guns and 5500 heavy guns. The Allies had available 97 French, 57 British, 10 Belgian, 1 American, and 2 Portuguese; altogether 167 divisions, estimated at 1585 battalions, 1,480,000 rifles, 74,000 sabres; 8900 field guns and 6800 heavy guns. So the Allied totals were still superior to the German, the German units, divisions, and battalions being smaller than the Allied. The rate at which their divisions could be brought from the East, where they still had 58, of rather inferior quality, was about 10 a month. Of those perhaps 40 at the most could be expected to appear in France, and so their maximum strength, between 200 and 210 divisions, would be reached in May. But the American divisions (of which one only was now in the line and counted) were beginning to come in;

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so that at no time would the German superiority in number over the Allies be near so great as the Allied superiority over the Germans had been for at least one and a half years. There ought, therefore, to have been no cause for anxiety.

On the Italian front there were still the 11 Anglo-French divisions sent there after Caporetto, and 50 Italian divisions; 764 battalions, 633,000 rifles, 6400 sabres; 3700 field guns and 2100 heavy guns. The enemy had only $43\frac{1}{2}$ Austrian and 3 German, a total of $46\frac{1}{2}$ divisions; 439,000 rifles, 3400 sabres; 3000 field guns and 1500 heavy guns. On the Italian front, therefore, we are still 6 to 4 in spite of Caporetto.

In the East the Austrians had 34 divisions, some of which might be expected to come to Italy; but on the other hand, the Italians had not yet put into the line all the divisions they had reconstructed out of their defeated troops during the winter, out of which they were ultimately to form the Sixth Army.

In the Balkans there were 23 Bulgarian, 2 German, and 2 Austrian divisions, a total of 27; 294 battalions, 228,000 rifles, 3000 sabres; 972 field guns and 353 heavy guns. On our side 8 French, $4\frac{1}{3}$ British, $1\frac{1}{2}$ Italian, 3 Greek, 6 Serbian, 1 Italian in Albania, 23 divisions in all; 271 battalions,

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219,000 rifles, 7000 sabres; 1100 field guns and 380 heavy guns. Here the enemy was slightly superior, but the Greek mobilisation was not finished; later in the spring the size of their contingent would be doubled or trebled; this would leave the advantage to the Allies again.

In Palestine and Mesopotamia the Allies were overwhelmingly larger than the Turks, whose battalions, by the time they reached the front, were all reduced to 200 or 300 by desertion. General Allenby in Palestine had 7 British and 1 Indian divisions; 117 battalions, 100,000 rifles, 16,000 sabres; 410 field guns and 93 heavy guns. Facing him were 11 Turkish divisions and 1 second-class German division at and south of Damascus; 107 battalions, but only 29,000 rifles and 3000 sabres and perhaps 200 or 300 guns. We were 3 to 1.

In Mesopotamia, 1 British and 5 Indian divisions; 101 battalions, 125,000 rifles, 9000 sabres; 300 field guns and 50 heavy guns. Against these the Turks had nominally 5 divisions and 47 battalions; but these only amounted to 18,000 rifles, 1000 sabres, and no more than 100 guns. Here we were 6 to 1.

This survey would not be complete without a mention of Lettow-Vorbeck in East Africa, with

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his 250 Europeans and 1500 Africans. A British and native force of 12,000 rifles, with a ration (not a combatant) strength of 55,000, were kept busy chasing him.

All military information from all Allied sources was concentrated by the Inter-Allied Staffs at Versailles; each week, for the convenience of the Military Representatives, tables were prepared in the British section showing the forces on each side in every theatre; the historian will find these figures in these tables.

So the Allies, in spite of losing the Russians and Roumanians, kingdoms of millions of men, who had thrown into the balance more than 190 divisions, in spite of not having more than one American division at their side from a country which had actually registered 25 million men as capable of military service, in spite of these deductions, at the beginning of 1918, still had the advantage.

War abstracts the world into a chess-board where each piece is measured in divisions. At the first meeting of the Supreme War Council, M. Venizelos harangued it for an hour on the past, present, and future glories of Hellas; but when he stopped drenching his audience with his eloquence, the only voice raised was that of General Robertson, who

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just asked, "How many divisions can you give us in the spring?" From the height of the Supreme War Council the number of divisions Greece could supply was all Greece stood for.

The plan of campaign for 1918 was the work of Foch, Sir Henry Wilson, and Mr. Lloyd George, in the sense that while some of the leaders of the Alliance favoured some parts of it, and others others, they were in favour of all of it and imposed it on all the other leaders. They, in effect, said to the Supreme War Council—

"We will stand on the defensive on the Western front till the Americans arrive; on the defensive, if we give the Allied armies on the front from the North Sea to the Adriatic a single organ of command, we should be able to resist the enemy, if they were able to resist us. But let us take the offensive in Palestine; Turkey is exhausted, and a defeat in Palestine will knock Turkey out. Such a result will have further consequences which we cannot foresee, but which might be decisive."

There were thus two parts to this plan, a central command in the West and an offensive in Palestine.

A central command seems easy to create. The French solution was that it should be given to a French general, a natural claim on a front where



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GENERAL ROBERTSON

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they had 103 divisions to 62 British and 50 Italian; but, as Sir Henry Wilson always insisted, the right to command, when complete and entire, involves the right to dismiss, and therefore it was a right which in simple entirety could not be given to any general of any single nation, for no army of any nation would bear having its leaders dismissed by a foreigner.

In effect, the function of a generalissimo would have been to fix the quantity and use of the Allied Reserve, if this whole front was treated as a single front. This would have been his work in a defensive campaign, such as was anticipated. Assuming that any point or points were threatened by the enemy, such a generalissimo would have decided the number, place, and movement of units from the rest of the front that were to go to the defence of that point.

Foch and Sir Henry Wilson put forward a simple and ingenious proposal, with the object of giving the three Allied armies all the advantages of a generalissimo without the objections; the three Commanders-in-Chief were to remain Commanders-in-Chief, but at Versailles there was to be formed an Executive War Board, with Foch as Chairman, General Cadorna as the Italian, and General Bliss

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as the American, members, and a British General as British member. This Board was to have the right to demand from each Commander-in-Chief a certain number of divisions which it could control. Divisions placed in the General Reserve would be ear-marked, and not to be used by any Commander-in-Chief without permission of the Executive War Board, which had authority to fix their number, place, movement, and use.

The Executive War Board, brought into existence to handle the General Reserve, gave each Commander-in-Chief the advantages of a generalissimo; the General Reserve was a banking account on which each could draw if he was attacked; his drafts would be fixed by the War Board, according to their judgment. On the other hand, he had none of the disadvantages of a generalissimo. No Commander-in-Chief could suspect his forces were being exploited for the benefit of an ally's forces, which had always been the real obstacle to unity of command; for each nation had its representative on the War Board. Sir Henry Wilson and Foch in effect argued—

“The system by which each Commander-in-Chief attacks separately is possible when on the offensive. But we must now stand on the defen-

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sive. Ludendorff will have about 200 divisions; he will leave 100 in the line, and attack one of the three Commanders-in-Chief, French, British, or Italian, with a mass of manœuvre of 100 divisions; no single Commander-in-Chief parts with his reserves willingly. There will be discussions and consequent loss of time that may be disastrous. There must be some superior authority to decide at once how much each of the others must contribute to help the one attacked. The Executive War Board, by means of the General Reserve, will do this."

The French and British members of the Executive War Board were, in fact, joint generalissimos of the Allied armies, and its membership became the greatest of military positions, the precious apple of gold the possessor of which might reap all the glory of the war, and it therefore at once became an apple of discord as well as an apple of gold. But Sir Henry's first proposal was that Foch and Robertson, the French and British Chiefs of Staff, should be the French and British members. Of course, Robertson eagerly welcomed and adopted the scheme.

Linked to this creation of a central command was the extension of the British front. After a very

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close consideration, it had been decided by the Military Representatives subject to the creation of a General Reserve, to extend that front as far as the Ailette, though the French wanted it carried as far as Berry au Bac. Taking all the factors, and there were many, into consideration, they decided this was a point to which the British armies ought to go. Proceeding on entirely different methods of calculation, both General Cadorna and Sir Henry Wilson's staffs, working independently, fixed on the point as giving them their just extension.

But Haig and Pétain decided together on Barisis as the point, and this compromise was adopted by the Supreme War Council. Haig did not cover the new space he thus had to fill by widening the front held by each division in the line, and so stretching out the front held by each of his armies. The front of every British division was narrower than the space covered, under similar conditions, by a French or German division. When the question of the extension of the line was being discussed this was a great argument in the mouths of the French. But Haig filled in the new space down to Barisis by drawing on his reserves, thus depleting them, and yet leaving the Fifth Army under Gough, that went into this new space, unduly extended and weak.

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The Military Representatives at Versailles argued—

“If the Allied line in France was treated as one front, it could not be equally strong at every point. Some portion must be thinner than others. But the creation of the General Reserve made this particular point a matter of indifference. For if the weak point was attacked, the General Reserve could be drawn there at once, and the War Board had the authority to make the General Reserve as large as it liked, drawing from all armies. So the weakest point could at once be made the strongest.”

Besides, Gough's army was at the point of junction of the Franco-British lines. They considered it rather an advantage that this point should be the weakest. It was evident—and the papers demonstrating this are in existence at Versailles—that if the German attack was met (in the only way it could be met) by both British and French troops fighting shoulder to shoulder at whatever point the attack came, then the most convenient point for us, and the worst for Ludendorff, was the point of junction of the French and British lines, just where Gough was, and for this reason: French and English, having each their own type of arms and supply, had each to have lines of communication of their

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own. It would be very inconvenient for us to establish these, say, to Switzerland, or for the French to do so, say, to Ypres. But this difficulty did not arise if the fighting took place at the point of junction; to that point they already existed for both armies.

The other part of the plan of campaign was the Palestine offensive; Allenby already had an overwhelming preponderance over the Turks. That preponderance was to be further increased: he was to be reinforced from Mesopotamia with forces originally fixed at a higher figure, but ultimately amounting to one Indian division. An Indian cavalry division in France was to be sent to him. His forces were so large that the real difficulty was supplying him, and his capacity for hitting hard depended much more upon the rate at which the railroad from Egypt could be pushed forward. But with a little time, and a great deal of railroad material, it was reckoned he ought to be able to annihilate the very inferior Turkish forces in front of him.

At a Session held at the end of January, the French members of the Supreme War Council at first presented some opposition to this Eastern project, but assented on condition that no white troops were removed from France for this attempt.

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There was also opposition to it from General Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. General Robertson was also proposed as the British member of the Executive War Board at this Session, but was excluded by Mr. Lloyd George, who placed General Sir Henry Wilson there instead. So the golden prize which had hung before Robertson was neatly made to fall into Sir Henry's mouth; Robertson, not unnaturally, was furious. This was quite visible. Long after the Supreme War Council had risen, after passing this resolution, and only a few secretaries being left in the room, Robertson still remained sitting alone in his place, motionless, his head resting on his hand, glaring silently in front of him.

This plan of campaign, in its two parts, a central command in France, and an offensive in Palestine, was in effect the plan that carried the Allies to victory in the autumn; Allenby's annihilation of the Turkish army in front of him knocked out the corner stone of the edifice of the enemy's power, and Foch's conduct of the operations in France led to a result that no one had anticipated. But the first winter edition of the plan was better both in means and conception than its autumn successor. Allenby's British troops were taken from him after the

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disaster of the spring, and Indian divisions substituted. Foch's authority as Chairman of the Executive War Board was better conceived and clearer than his authority as Generalissimo, which was never exactly defined. If the second edition of this plan of campaign finished the war, the first edition would have done it even more surely. So great in war is the importance of a good plan, that as soon as it was found and carried out, the war ended. In the winter of 1917-1918, a friend talking of the difficulties in front of the Allies, said to Foch's Chief of Staff, Weygand—

“However bad our situation may seem now, it was worse for you and General Foch at the Marne; for you were heavily outnumbered, and we will still be superior till the month of April.”

Weygand answered—

“Our situation is much worse now; for then we had the magnificent plan of Marshal Joffre, and now we have no plan at all.”

Many legends exist about almost every event of war, especially of modern war; any true account of any of these events would be voluminous, or rather interminable, if it were attempted to dispute and destroy the legendary cloud that surrounds it. But it was asserted at that time, and some people

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continue not only to repeat, but to write, that during this winter 1917-1918 the army was being starved of men, and that our statesmen endangered our soldiers and brought defeat on them, by refusing to reinforce them or to raise the men necessary to reinforce them. This is not the case; it is a false view, invented and circulated for a particular purpose, that of explaining away repeated and almost constant failure of generalship. It continues to be repeated by simple people who at all times are disposed to think that wars are not won by brains, and that those who do the thinking without risking life or limb must always be wrong, and that those who risk life and limb must always be right, however little they may think. The first set of figures disproving this legend are the totals of the expeditionary force on the Western front, from the North Sea to the Adriatic, including all ranks and units. On July 1, 1915, there were 603,803 (six hundred and three thousand, eight hundred and three) men; on January 1, 1917, 1,591,745 (one million, five hundred and ninety-one thousand, seven hundred and forty-five men; on January 1, 1918, 1,937,719 (one million, nine hundred and thirty-seven thousand, seven hundred and nineteen) men; on April 1, 1918, 2,019,773 (two millions, nineteen thousand,

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seven hundred and seventy-three) men; on November 11, 1918, 1,939,529 (one million, nine hundred and thirty-nine thousand, five hundred and twenty-nine) men. The legend in this case is not only distorting, but is the opposite of the truth. The spring of 1918 is the high-water mark reached by our armies on the Western front. The second set of figures are the totals of all our forces at home and abroad, including British, Colonial, Indian, native, and local troops (but excluding labour battalions) in every theatre of war. In November of the year 1916, this total was 149,226 (one hundred and forty-nine thousand, two hundred and twenty-six) officers, and 4,061,628 (four million, sixty-one thousand, six hundred and twenty-eight) other ranks; in December of the year 1917, 208,583 (two hundred and eight thousand, five hundred and eighty-three) officers, and 4,698,585 (four million, six hundred and ninety-eight thousand, five hundred and eighty-five) other ranks; in March of the year 1918, 220,770 (two hundred and twenty thousand, seven hundred and seventy) officers, and 4,761,484 (four million, seven hundred and sixty-one thousand, four hundred and eighty-four) other ranks; at the Armistice, 193,102 (one hundred and ninety-three thousand, one hundred and two)

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officers, and 4,197,099 (four million, one hundred and ninety-seven thousand, and ninety-nine) other ranks. The spring of 1918 is, therefore, also the high-water mark reached by all the military forces of the Crown.¹ If we suffered, it was not because, according to the cant phrase, the politicians betrayed our soldiers.

The Supreme War Council adopted this plan for 1918, at a session in the last days of January and the first days of February, 1918. The utmost precautions of secrecy were adopted; for some of the sittings most of the secretaries were excluded from the room. The copies of the plan of campaign and of the minutes of the meeting were limited to a few copies and put in the hands of only a few people. For Ludendorff, as he has now told us, was as anxious about being attacked as the Allies were. His position, a few weeks before the campaign could be expected to open, was anxious and precarious; on almost every front he was outnumbered. The collapse of any of the numerous fronts meant the loss of an ally whose fall would probably bring down another, till the four Central Powers knocked each other down like skittles. Through the two main

¹ The historian can find these figures in the Statistical Abstract of the War, in the Archives of the War Office.

channels, Danish and Swiss, along which the indiscretions of the enemy reached the ears of the Allies, they could know his apprehensions, which he confesses in his published memoirs. Verdun, close to the line of railroad which gave them lateral communication, was a sensitive point in the German defensive system, and here the German General Staff anticipated an attack by the Allies that would forestall theirs. There was no secret more precious than where the Allied attack was coming. The various theatres of war, in which the system of the Central Powers lay, were strung out along an awkward line, separated by nature, and, in the East, connected by railroad lines of communication insufficient, defective, and slow. Ignorant where the aim of the Allies was, no portion could be firmly defended by Ludendorff unless information was acquired where the blow was intended to fall; then forces sufficient to meet it might be concentrated in that quarter. The information was, therefore, inestimable.

Public opinion in France and Italy had been canvassing the question of a Supreme Commander in the field during the whole winter, and was naturally concerned at the disconnection between the three armies defending its soil. To reassure this

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opinion, the news that these armies had been given a certain unity under Foch was published in the papers, but in a vague and misleading way. The other decision, to overwhelm the Turkish armies in Palestine, was guarded with greater precautions of secrecy than any other decision ever taken by the Supreme War Council.

An extraordinarily brilliant writer on military matters, perhaps the very best, Colonel Repington, had till the beginning of January been military correspondent of the *Times*; at that date he left the *Times*, which had grown critical of General Robertson, and became military correspondent of the *Morning Post*. He has lately published two large volumes of *War Diaries*, which shed a flood of unexpected light upon the relations of this journalist with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Robertson, and with his chief Staff Officer and inseparable attendant, General Maurice, the then Director of Military Operations, who in May, 1918, was compulsorily retired from the Army.¹ The conclusions to be drawn from the combined evidence of Repington's newspaper articles and these

¹ See Appendix A: "The relations between General Robertson, General Maurice, and Colonel Repington" for a full discussion of their relations.

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Diaries are these. During Robertson's tenure of office, Repington was the instrument, the very effective instrument, of Robertson and his assistant Maurice in the Press. Robertson criticised to Repington the Government, of which he was the technical military adviser, and thus violated his duty to his superiors; disclosed to him all our essential military secrets; and disparaged our Allies to him. Repington's services to Robertson were public adulation; press agitation in favour of Robertson's ideas; and public denunciation of Robertson's superiors for the advantage of Robertson. Thus the closest connection existed between them. The evidence to this effect is long and rather tedious, and will be found elsewhere.¹

On February 11, an article by Repington was published in the *Morning Post*. This article was a detailed and accurate account of the decisions and discussions of the last Session of the Supreme War Council. It described with fulness the Executive War Board as "The Versailles soldiers under the presidency of General Foch," controlling and directing the reserves, and reveals the machinery by criticising it. He describes what he calls "the side show," in the very words of Mr. Lloyd George,

¹ In Appendix A.

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as recorded in the minutes of the Session, as "the delivery of a knock-out blow to Turkey." So as to leave nothing in doubt, he indicates the theatre of war where the side show is to take place: "The Turks will retire in front of us from Damascus to Aleppo." The article also tells Ludendorff what Allenby's real difficulty was, the very point of the discussion that the Supreme War Council had had, "how long will it take for our broad-gauge railway, at the rate of half a mile a day, to reach Aleppo?" It also suggested to Ludendorff the best means of parrying the blow, "to evade Allenby's offensive by retiring, and bring the U-boats down the Danube to Constantinople." The article is a summary, a very excellent and concise summary, of the principal discussions and decisions that had taken place, at a Session when the Supreme War Council had refined on their usual precautions for secrecy, extravagant as these usually were. It can only have been written by some one who had the records of the Session in front of his eyes. This is also true of many entries in the *Diaries*. This charge made by me,¹ of disclosing all these military secrets, has not been disputed by Repington; in an article² he not

¹ In *Blackwood's Magazine*, Sept. issue, 1920.

² See *Nineteenth Century*, Oct. issue, 1920.

only admits it, but seems gratified by it as a tribute to his own importance.

Repington not only made disclosures: the disclosures themselves are pretexts for an attack on Mr. Lloyd George. He hopes "that Parliament will extract a definite promise from Mr. Lloyd George" that the decisions of the Supreme War Council will not be carried out. He invites Parliament and the Army Council as well to act, and act according to his own opinion, that "Mr. Lloyd George had clearly and finally proved his incapacity to govern England in a great war." His object in revealing our military secrets is to overturn the Government.

The first decision of the War Cabinet was to seize the printing-presses of the *Morning Post*, and to suppress it entirely. But after a talk with his Attorney-General, Sir Gordon Hewart, Mr. Lloyd George adopted a course much more astute. Repington and the editor of the *Morning Post* (whose patriotic intentions are above suspicion) were prosecuted only for an offence under the Defence of the Realm Act, and Sir Gordon took care, during the prosecution, to make only the disclosures about the General Reserve a subject of complaint; the passage about the side show, which revealed the

secret of the Allies, he treated as inoffensive. This artful treatment may have attenuated the effect of the publication.

A violent dispute had arisen between Robertson and the War Cabinet on the Versailles decisions in the second week of February. On Thursday, February 14, Mr. Lloyd George decided to replace Robertson by Sir Henry Wilson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Repington's article revealing the Versailles decisions and the military plans of the Alliance appeared during the second week of February, on February 11. He invited the House of Commons to withdraw their confidence in Mr. Lloyd George because he had participated in these decisions and formed these plans.

On February 5, the then leader of the Opposition, Mr. Asquith, had asked the Government what the Versailles decisions had been, but had been refused all information. Not knowing what they were, he could not make them the ground of an attack on the Government. On February 12 the business of the House was to be the Debate on the Address, which always gives the Opposition the opportunity of attacking the Government on any grounds it likes to choose. Repington's article on February 11 gave

Mr. Asquith the knowledge he required, and, armed with it, he attacked Mr. Lloyd George on February 12, but without success.

The Repington article therefore was, in fact, used inside the House of Commons against the Government at a moment when Robertson was quarrelling with the Government outside it, and his dismissal was impending. On February 21 Repington was convicted and fined at Bow Street. In his *Diaries* (February 26, 1918), he publishes a letter from Robertson, dated February 25 (and too inimitably in Robertson's style to be other than genuine), which is worth reading with the greatest care.¹

In this letter Robertson congratulates Repington on his conduct, as the noble work of a patriot, and condoles with him on his conviction; and subsequently, according to the *Diaries*, he remained on terms of cordial friendship with him.

Further, this letter very strongly suggests that during the preceding month Robertson and Repington had been collaborating in a common enterprise, called "sordid" by Robertson himself, of which the object was to upset the Government, and that the publication of Repington's article had been part of this enterprise.

¹ For text of this letter, see Appendix A.

Repington's explanation of where he got his information cannot be accepted, for reasons set out elsewhere.¹ As it is difficult to accept Repington's explanation that he got his information from the French source he mentions; as the only possible source of his information was copies of the records of this Session in the hands of General Robertson; as he expressed in his article the views of Robertson; as, in his letter of February 25, Robertson uses language strongly suggesting that the publication of the article was intended to assist Robertson in upsetting Mr. Lloyd George, and it was, in fact, so used in the House of Commons. These considerations, taken together with the previous and subsequent relations existing between them, form a mass of circumstantial evidence pointing, with undeviating finger, at General Robertson himself as having supplied Repington with the information he divulged to the enemy.

If this supposition seems shocking, it is no more shocking than the fact that Robertson approved of Repington's action, both by his words and his acts. The difference in culpability between applauding and instigating such conduct is faint and shadowy, if it exists at all. The same censure applies to

¹ See Appendix A again.

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Maurice, who is so hardened in these practices that even now he writes as if unconscious that the publication of one's country's military plans to the world in time of war is wrongful, however obtained and whatever the object.¹

The Executive War Board—Foch, Wilson, Bliss, Cadorna—got to work at once. Foch proposed that the General Reserve should begin by being a seventh of the total Allied force from the North Sea to the Adriatic, and fixed it at thirty divisions; and on February 6, letters were addressed to each Commander-in-Chief asking him if he would contribute his quota, proportionate to the number of divisions he commanded, to the General Reserve. On February 14, Sir Henry Wilson succeeded Sir William Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London, and was succeeded at Versailles by General Rawlinson.

Foch, when he came to Versailles, was an old man, unwell and worn with anxiety, and beginning to lose his trim horseman's figure. He shone in debate as much as he did in action. In his profound grasp of any question; in his capacity for dealing at once, and, conclusively, with any op-

¹ See his article on this subject in Oct. issue, 1920, of *National Review*.

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posite point which he rejected; in the skill with which he exposed the fallacy of an unsound argument; in the flexible readiness with which he adapted his attitude to any contrary idea he felt unable to refute; in the facility and rapidity with which he evolved schemes to reach a common agreement; in the closely woven and orderly logic of his thought; in the rapid, almost exuberant, flow of his speech; in the flashing power of illustrating his meaning; in his ruthless contempt for weaker dialecticians; in all these he resembled a great Chancery special. In the simplicity of his ways—he had not even an A.D.C., and he used to arrive alone, his papers under his arm, with an absence of ceremony astonishing to any one accustomed to the pomp that surrounds even a brigadier—in the roughness of his ways, a strong contrast to the gentlemanly English, and grand manner of the Italians; in his extreme piety; in all these he was like a rustic French curé, redolent of the soil, the true soil of France, the soil of peasants and soldiers, descendants of those who accomplished the *Gesta Dei per Francos*, very different from the glittering foam of Paris. In sheer intellect, he towered above everyone at the Supreme War Council as much as Mr. Lloyd George did in courage.

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Bliss and Cadorna were not quite on the same level as the other members; for Bliss had not yet got his army, and Cadorna had lost his. Cadorna had this advantage, that he was the only member who had ever been a Commander-in-Chief: this gave him an ease and sureness of judgment, a sort of light touch, which in these, as in other great affairs, only experience can give. But he was a beaten general, and the French never let him forget it, and trampled on him ruthlessly. "Defend the Piave," thundered Foch in a voice roughened by half a century of command, as Cadorna began his eternal complaints and his eternal petitions for more guns, more men, more coal, more of everything. "I tell you how I would defend the Piave; I would put a few sentries along the bank." Then after a pause and a reflective pull at his moustache, "And even then I would only put wooden sentries." Bliss had the goodwill, the industry, the sagacity, the massive bulk and slow movement of an elephant. He would have been the pillar of this or any other council, for he brought to the Alliance, where the members of every Inter-Allied team all pulled different ways, what it needed most, rigid impartiality, even towards its own government. "Very well, let Bliss arbitrate" ("Eh bien,

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prenons Bliss comme juge de paix”), Foch used to exclaim, when a discussion got too heated; and Bliss listened like a sage and benevolent pachyderm. But once his mind was made up, he stuck his hoofs in the ground and was immovable. Even Foch dashed at him in vain. There was something very fine about his character, as there was about all American leaders, like Pershing and Sims (and about their subordinates), who came to Versailles; they seemed determined to make their disinterestedness cancel their inexperience. They were all quite untouched by the taint of bad faith and personal calculation that seems to load the air where the great are. In the Great War the New World not only came to redress the balance of the Old, but to set it an example.

During the first half of the month of February, the German scheme of attack became clearer. The Allied and the German lines formed an angle, and the German divisions in large masses began to accumulate towards the point of the angle: here also appeared Von Hutier, at the head of an army. He was a specialist in surprise attacks; and at the capture of Riga, in the preceding autumn, the Germans had used a new manœuvre invented by him. As soon as he appeared the Grand État-Major

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circulated a minute analysis of the Riga attack.¹ Instead of collecting their attacking divisions in front of the point at which it was aimed to break through, these were kept very far back from the line, and brought up to the point stealthily the night before; so that the enemy, though he might guess the region, could not guess exactly where. While these divisions were at this distance from the line, they practised over ground artificially made to resemble the real point of attack. This sudden concentration was an invention appropriate to the German genius for secret and tireless organisation.

Foch in effect said to the Executive War Board—

“Ludendorff must launch his mass of attack either westward or southward, either towards the British side of the angle in the Cambrai region, or towards the French side of the angle and the Rheims region. But if he is successful and drives one or other of these lines back, he himself presents an unguarded and open flank; and the more successful he is, and the more he enlarges the angle, the longer and therefore the more open and unguarded his flank will be.

“I will, therefore, divide my General Reserve

¹ The historian can find it in the Registry at Versailles.

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into three portions, of different sizes. The smallest portion I will place in Dauphinée, close to the best crossing into Italy: the largest I will concentrate round Paris; the third portion I will place round Amiens. From the concentration of German troops the attack must come in the Rheims or Cambrai region; therefore the bulk of the General Reserve round Paris is best situated to come to the help of either region. The Amiens portion stands behind the British Fifth Army, the weakest point of the line, and ready to support it. The Dauphinée portion is situated so as to be able to go to the assistance of the Swiss or the Italians, in the unlikely event of their being attacked, or to rejoin the rest of the General Reserve."¹

Foch did no more than outline the part to be played by the General Reserve, for it never was to come into existence. Major Grasset quotes Napoleon as saying that the art of war is simple enough to understand; it is doing it that is difficult. The outline of Foch's plan was perfectly simple: Ludendorff had formed his mass of manœuvre near

¹ My authority for this account has been questioned. I may therefore say that I acted as sole interpreter and as joint secretary to the Executive War Board in all its meetings; heard him say it, and saw him mark the places with his blue pencil on the map.

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the apex of the angle formed by the front in France; it could only be used to drive in the French side of the angle or the British. He could only do one of two things, push back the British to and over the Somme, or the French over the Aisne towards the Marne; in either case he exposed himself to a counter-attack on his open flank, from Foch's mass of manœuvre concentrated round Paris. Whichever he did, he had delivered himself into Foch's hands.

In March he chose the British side and flung himself at Gough's Fifth Army. Ludendorff has also told us why he chose this line of attack; the Allied line was weakest there, and he chose the line of least resistance.

His strategy was the "buffalo strategy" Foch has always mocked. For Foch first attracted attention twenty years ago when he taught his pupils of the French Staff College that Moltke, acting on a fixed plan, adopted blindfold, ought to have been beaten in 1870 and only won by luck.¹ In his various public utterances made since the Armistice, he has invariably lavished praise on the German soldier ("ce sont d'admirables soldats")

¹ See *Les principes de la Guerre*, by Colonel Foch (Berger-Levrault, Paris), Ch. VIII., "La sûreté stratégique."

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and organisation, but always derided "la stratégie d'outre-Rhin."

Ludendorff's plan, thus fixed, the prescience of Foch had divined when he intended to put the bulk of the General Reserve round Paris and Amiens. The buffalo was rushing into the trap. But the General Reserve was never constituted, so Foch never carried out his plan.

The letters sent to the Commanders-in-Chief by the Executive War Board, asking them to contribute their quota to the General Reserve, were dated February 6¹; by February 19 the French and Italian answers were received, assenting.

On February 22 Sir Douglas Haig and Pétain met at the Grand Quartier-Général and arranged another scheme of defence on a completely different principle to that of the General Reserve. It was the principle that if one army was attacked the other should assist by taking over part of its line. Under the General Reserve Plan, an authority higher than any of the Commanders-in-Chief decided what assistance one of them could receive from the other. Under the arrangement of February 22 every Commander-in-Chief decided for

¹ I adjusted the French and English text of these letters as the Executive War Board decided it.

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himself what assistance he would give a colleague. It was the principle upon which the offensives against the Germans had been conducted in France, and which the Military Representative at Versailles had considered was unsuited to a defensive plan.

This new scheme certainly would not have been initiated by Pétain, as it was, without the assent of M. Clemenceau. But it was unknown to Foch, who waited patiently for the English answer the whole of February.

The fighting was expected to begin the first week in March, when the plan of campaign was adopted during the session of the Supreme War Council. "You will be attacked on March 1," Clemenceau had said to Haig during a dialogue, if this conversation could be called a dialogue, where Clemenceau never stopped even to take breath, and Haig never uttered a single word.¹

On March 3 (and it is the knowledge of this date that shows how well informed Major Grassett is) a letter from Sir Douglas, dated March 2, written in answer to a letter dated February 6, and therefore

¹ They were standing next to where I sat writing at a table. The contrast between the whirling volubility of the one, and the blank muteness of the other, was amusing.

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evidently kept back, reached the Executive War Board refusing to contribute any divisions to the General Reserve, except British divisions in Italy, which were not under his command.¹ The historian is referred to this letter, and should observe the style and thought of the British Commander-in-Chief. The Italian Military Representative immediately declared the Italian contribution to the General Reserve must be considered as withdrawn, if there was to be no English contribution. The General Reserve thus vanished, and with it the Executive War Board faded away, for it had been brought into existence to handle the General Reserve, and for no other purpose. Though for some time it continued to discuss, it never was to act. Major Grasset says, not quite accurately—

“Finally, in their Session of March 3, and in spite of the energetic protests of General Foch, the Council went so far as to decide upon an important reduction of the Inter-Allied Reserve, and to envisage nothing more than resisting, as well as

¹ My accuracy as to this letter has been questioned: I may mention I myself translated it into French, and communicated it to the French section on its arrival; and acted as interpreter and secretary to the meeting of the Executive War Board which discussed it, and drafted the minutes of the meeting.

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might be, the German effort, though this threatened to be of the most formidable type."

The refusal of Haig, which was communicated to Mr. Lloyd George from Versailles, came as a surprise and a violent shock to him; but it cannot altogether have come as a surprise to Sir Henry Wilson.

The Supreme War Council had created the Executive War Board, with the two Commanders-in-Chief in attendance, and without even a protest on their part. In any event, even if they had protested, it was an order. This order they determined to disregard, and fight the battle according to the method they preferred, as separate commanders of separate armies, instead of as one army, because one army meant an authority above their own. But to evade it, each used a different manner. Pétain answered Foch's letter of February 6, granted the number of divisions demanded of him, and, I believe, identified and even allocated them. They were the Third Army under Humbert, and the First under Debeney, between fourteen and twenty divisions. He relied on his colleague, who had had previous experience in evading these orders, to make this obedience void. At the Calais Conference on February 27, 1917, Lloyd George

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had established Nivelle as supreme authority over Haig. When Nivelle issued orders to him, a few days later on March 4, Haig repudiated his authority, causing a serious crisis between us and our French ally.¹ But he had then made his repudiation immediate, and not waited for the attack, which Nivelle had fixed for April, to begin. He now improved on this method. He did not even protest at the supreme authority placed above him by the Supreme War Council, but kept back his repudiation till March 3, that is to say, till the fighting was about to begin, and it would be impossible to replace him. These were the coils in which Mr. Lloyd George was constantly wrapped, and against which he struggled so resolutely, amid such a storm of obloquy.

The Protocol, the Minutes, as we say, of the plan between him and General Pétain as drawn up at the Grand Quartier-Général, are contained in document No. 5476 of the Operations Branch of the G. H. Q. (3ième Bureau). This document has only to be placed next to the Resolutions of the Supreme War Council, creating the Executive War

¹ For the full text of the French Prime Minister's protest to Mr. Lloyd George, on March 6, see Appendix B, "Unity of Command in 1917."

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Board and the General Reserve, for the inconsistency to appear. It was impossible to carry out both plans.

This arrangement was made on February 22, but this document, No. 5476 of the 3ième Bureau, Grand Quartier-Général, was not drawn up till March 5, and is dated March 5, and reached Versailles much later. There must be some reason for this delay in making minutes, which should naturally be made as soon as possible after the event they record. It is easy to find the reason. Pétain, the Commander-in-Chief at the front, did not want Foch, the Chief of the Staff, at the Boulevard des Invalides in Paris, to know of this agreement, which destroyed the scheme of the General Reserve, till it was too late to protest. The fighting was expected to begin in March, and the drafting of the minute was delayed till then. So was Haig's answer to a letter dated February 6. So far as Foch was concerned, the agreement was a secret agreement, and he was therefore the victim of an intrigue, a most humiliating intrigue. Speaking of the catastrophe that was to follow, Major Grasset says: "There was needed this extreme peril and the crushing force of this blow to open men's eyes and to silence certain vanities." Mr. Belloc has here



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MARSHAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG

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misunderstood and therefore mistranslated Major Grasset's allusion.

The Supreme War Council, in a Session held in London in the first half of March, assented in effect to the rejection of the plan adopted at the previous Session. For it gave only the eleven Anglo-French divisions as General Reserve to the Executive War Board, which faded away. Foch protested to the Supreme War Council, demanded a supreme command with an Inter-Allied Staff, and was heavily snubbed. Clemenceau forbade Foch to argue with Haig about his refusal to contribute to the General Reserve. But on March 15, before the Supreme War Council separated, Foch, with his own terrible and leonine vehemence of speech, warned the dismayed leaders of the Alliance of the coming disaster, if they persisted in divided command and scattered reserves. This was six days before the battle.

The scheme of the General Reserve, which Sir Douglas thus rejected, gave him the right to the assistance of his two colleague Commanders-in-Chief, and a delicately adjusted, almost automatic, machine, the Executive War Board, for asserting this right. With this machine he could extract their reserves from these colleagues in the quantity and in the way he required, with an impartial arbi-

trator, the Executive War Board, to fix the quantity and method as soon as he appealed to it, and which, before even he appealed to it, weeks before the battle, had already contemplated putting assistance that would probably have been equal to a third or a half of his whole army in close proximity to it. He rejected this plan, and with Pétain adopted another plan of operations. The Versailles principle was to treat the three fronts, British, French, and Italian, as one front, and to engage the enemy wherever he came on, with British, French, and Italian forces. Haig and Pétain adopted quite another principle; according to the old method, each of the fronts, British or French, was treated as a separate front, and the enemy might be engaged under certain contingencies by each army, French or British, separately. There can be no doubt about the plan of operations they adopted; for it was embodied in a written agreement made between the two.¹ Presumably in most battles commanders have kept their main idea inside their own head, but in this case it exists in writing.

The agreement provides that they are to assist each other, but in one way, and one way only: the

¹ The historian can easily find it in the Registry at Versailles. The reference number in the Registry is file 26/E./6.

extreme French left met the extreme British right at Barisis, the point of junction of the two lines. Whichever of the two was attacked, the other, in case of need, agreed to help his colleague by extending his own line, but by extension only. The helper would thus relieve a certain number of his colleague's division, who would be released for use elsewhere. But it was by extension only. If we were attacked, for example, on our left, at Ypres, the French relieved divisions on our extreme right; but they were not bound to come and fight shoulder to shoulder with us at Ypres. Similarly, if Pétain was attacked on his extreme right, in Switzerland, for example, we were under an obligation to begin taking over the line on his extreme left, but not to fight shoulder to shoulder with the French in the Jura. The exact dimensions this extension of either the French left or the British right was to take had to be left unfixed, and depended on the judgment and goodwill of the helper. Further, Pétain naturally did not want to be called upon to take over portions of line on which a battle was actually proceeding. So he stipulated—and the stipulation is expressed in the plainest terms—that he was only bound to extend his extreme left if we were attacked at a portion of our line other than our extreme right.

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Though the Supreme War Council had issued orders to all Commanders-in-Chief to send all plans of operations at once to Versailles, this agreement could not be obtained from G.H.Q. till the fighting had actually begun. On its arrival these criticisms were at once made of it.

First: Either Pétain or Haig, according to this scheme, might have to fight Ludendorff alone, which was impossible. For his 200 divisions must sooner or later by their mere rotation (*roulement*) in the line, and quite apart from their mass, have exhausted even Pétain's 97, still more Haig's 57. In the event, Ludendorff burst the British with one giant charge of his whole mass.

Secondly: Neither Pétain nor Haig was bound to make any preparation beforehand to assist the other, because neither could know whether he was to be helper or helped. In the event, neither of them did make any preparation, as the map¹ shows at a glance.

¹ See map at end of book. "Map showing position of all Allied Divisions in France in the third week of March, 1918, before the battle of St. Quentin." The position of the British divisions was obtained from G.H.Q.; the position of the French divisions from the French section of the Supreme War Council, and is undoubtedly correct. I mention this because the G.H.Q. map was marked to show a number of

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Thirdly: As the helper was left to decide the amount of help, it was certain that the Commanders-in-Chief would haggle and dispute, every general by nature clinging to his reserves like a miser to his money. Naturally, for the safety of the troops for which he is responsible is his paramount motive. So delay would occur that might be disastrous. In the event, there was prolonged haggling, and consequent disastrous delay.

Fourthly: As Pétain was bound to assist Haig by extending his left, and in that way only, and as it was stipulated that Pétain was not bound to make this extension if the German attack occurred at Haig's extreme right, it followed that Haig had dispensed the French from assisting him at all if he was attacked on his extreme right, even if attacked by the whole German army. In the event, he was attacked by the whole German army, on his extreme right.

In a word, Haig's plan of operations contemplated that, under certain contingencies, he would fight Ludendorff, who was more than three times as strong as he was, all alone. Those contingencies

French divisions round Paris, which were really near Rheims and the Aisne. This struck our officers who had charge of these maps at Versailles very forcibly.

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arose. Ludendorff attacked him from Barisis northwards with his whole army. If the historian is incredulous about this plan, as he may well be, he is referred to the document. Besides, in consequence of this plan, the British army, as will be shown later, did in fact engage the entire German army for a whole week with assistance from the French so small and tardy as to be almost useless.

There appears also to have been a further verbal agreement by which Haig undertook, whatever happened, not to require any help from Pétain till the fourth day of the battle. So the French Operations officers at Versailles declared most emphatically, and, though there was means of checking their statement, there is no reason whatever to reject it.

The press, the scene of so many of our military triumphs, raised the clamour, and still in some very partial quarters continues to do so, that this soldier was not reinforced by the politicians as he ought to have been, and was kept short of men. The only way in which the politicians could have enabled this soldier to execute the plan of operations he had himself conceived would have been to treble his army.

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General Staffs, in times of modern war, when the nation becomes an army, are the most powerful organisms in the State, for almost every one must obey them, and they tend to supersede the State itself. Through their huge patronage they lay hands on the legislature and the press. But above all, public opinion is theirs to shape it as they please; for that great two-handed engine of deception, the censorship which conceals the truth, and propaganda which creates the false, is in their hands. This machine, created originally for one purpose, to deceive the enemy, had come, perhaps unavoidably, to be used for deceiving everybody, soldiers and civilians. Keeping up the *morale*, in the jargon of the war, is the purpose of this second deception, as if men who give their lives with such generosity, without hesitation, needed lies as a further inducement to do so. It is an easy and efficient engine to work, for people are left far more uninstructed, and are far more misled by newspapers in our enlightened period than ever they were by rumour in the past, before the spread of education had made it possible to induce people to believe anything by printing it. Germans were sure half London was burnt and in ashes; and we have never heard of German victories, like Pil-

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kallen, when they took as many as 100,000 Russian prisoners.

But falsehood, however indispensable (and perhaps in this case it is unavoidable), exacts its price; and here it recoils in an unexpected direction. Generals can have great reputations which are entirely artificial. They do not have to win victories or campaigns; the subject press bureau and the tame herd of special correspondents or special press agents¹ do it for them. It is in the High Command, and not in the line, that the art of camouflage is most practised, and reaches to highest flights. All chiefs everywhere are now kept painted, by the busy work of numberless publicists, so as to be mistaken for Napoleons—at a distance. Canny Scots soon discover that having the brother of the editor of the leading newspaper of the majority party of the legislature as a chaplain-general is a greater piece of luck than breaking the German line, and a long visit from an influential newspaper proprietor preferable to a good plan of operations. Criticism and doubt becomes scandalous or illegal outside the armies, and (quite rightly) indiscipline and insubordination within them. It ceases to be necessary for Generals to win even wars; they will

¹ See Appendix A.

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be almost as victorious if they lose them. This is not fanciful, for almost the whole German people believe Hindenburg unvanquished and invincible; they believe he never was defeated, but broke off the fight and submitted because Germany's allies deserted her. In spite of the Armistice, he is just as much a conqueror to-day as when his authority extended from Dunkirk to Kieff; and before we deride them as dupes, it is as well to remember that a great many sensible people here are sure that the retreat of the Fifth Army in March, 1918, was an ingenious manœuvre, and most people consider that what the Germans call the Bloodbath (*das Blutbad*) of the Somme was an Allied triumph, though, being almost twice as strong as the Germans, they could only gain a few miles of ground at a stupendous cost. Joffre, whose mistakes in the first weeks of the war nearly lost it, remains seated in the hearts of the French as a national hero, however much commissions of inquiry may expose him.¹ No doubt if Haig had been driven into the sea in April, 1918, as seemed likely, he would have

¹ See the report of the "Commission parlementaire d'enquête sur le rôle et la situation de la métallurgie en France," which made a searching inquiry into the conduct of operations in August, 1914.

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remained just as immortally glorious and some one else would have been to blame. A new doctrine has come to prevail that Commanders-in-Chief can do no wrong and are not responsible.

Statesmen, of course, know the truth. Any one in the room at the Supreme War Council who knew these heroes remote from their godlike state, bright pomp of swarming obsequious Staff Officers, millionaire A.D.C.s and attendant Major-Generals, motors and mounted orderlies, secretaries and cooks, with the fountains of official eulogy playing on them in ceaseless glittering streams, could measure their real stature, in all its naked and tragic mediocrity: naked, because the working of their confused, slow, and narrow minds revealed itself without chance of concealment in those keen debates with masterly heads like Sonnino or Foch; and tragic, because these incapables and intriguers, thus decorated and exalted, disposed haphazard of all those brilliant young generations that were being mowed in swathes by the German scythe. If any one could do so, very much more could minds as quick and piercing as Mr. Lloyd George's, or deep and experienced as Lord Milner's, estimate them. But these fictitious conquerors are unshakable and cannot be uprooted, so deep is their real

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hold on the army and the nation.¹ The French Prime Minister protested in vain to Mr. Lloyd George in 1917 against Haig's "repeated tendencies to evade the instructions given to him," and his "constantly renewed tendency to call into question the plan of operations adopted by the Conference," but Mr. Lloyd George could do nothing. It becomes almost impossible to displace these Napoleons, whatever their incompetence, because of the enormous public support created by hiding or glossing failure, and exaggerating or inventing success.

This is probably true of every belligerent. Salandra, for example, the Italian Prime Minister, was overthrown in 1916 for daring to doubt Cadorna, though Cadorna had never done anything but fail.² Salandra the politician ventured to think Cadorna the soldier was not invincible, on no other ground except that Cadorna was always beaten. So Cadorna continued muddling away thousands of lives in his blundering offensives, and his bubble reputation continued to grow bigger and brighter till

¹ See the account of Haig's refusal to obey the decisions of the Calais Conference in 1917, in Appendix B, "Unity of Command in 1917."

² See *La Nostra Guerra*, by Generale E. Vigano; Firenze: F. Le Monnier.

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Caporetto burst it; even then his sycophants in the press clamoured that the defeat and the loss of half a million men was not due to Cadorna, but to something else.

And no one else was as loyal and long-suffering as we were. Falkenhayn had to go after Verdun, and Nivelle after the Chemin des Dames, in spite of all their laurels. But Haig survived the Somme, and Passchendaele, and St. Quentin, and their huge slaughters, next to any one of which the Chemin des Dames failure—where Nivelle only just missed—is inconsiderable or trivial. Haig's reputation survived the loss of very nearly half a million men in Picardy in 1916, and another loss of very nearly half a million men in Flanders in 1917; when, in a speech made at the end of 1917, Mr. Lloyd George hinted at dissatisfaction with our High Command, a universal cry of reprobation went up from the whole country. He called this superstition the military Moloch.¹ We cannot complain if we so blindly adored the idol that devoured us.

But the most insidious and worst effect of this so highly organised falsity is on the generals themselves: modest and patriotic as they mostly are,

¹ To Repington. See Repington's *Diaries*, Oct. 21, 1916.

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and as most men must be to take up and follow the noble profession of arms, they themselves are ultimately affected by these universal illusions, and, reading it every morning in the paper, they also grow persuaded they are thunderbolts of war and infallible, however much they fail, and that their maintenance in command is an end so sacred that it justifies the use of any means. There were strange happenings in London when Sir Henry Wilson succeeded General Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The War Cabinet took their decision on Thursday, February 14; but General Robertson, not for the first time, treated them and their decisions as if they did not exist. For several mornings Sir Henry went down to the War Office to find his room still occupied by General Robertson, carrying on as usual and ignoring him entirely. As is evident from his press, General Robertson, who had felt strong enough to try and turn Mr. Lloyd George out with the help of Repington on February 12, anticipated that the House of Commons, which was to discuss the new appointment on Tuesday, February 19, would dismiss the Prime Minister who had dared to dismiss him; as indeed Robertson's chief Staff Officer, Maurice, was publicly to incite the House of Commons to

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do in May. It was the duty of the Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, to eject him; but he had pledged himself to both sides, and remained timidly neutral, tremulously uncertain which cause it would be most advantageous to desert, and waiting anxiously to see which party was the strongest. It was not until the House of Commons, on Tuesday afternoon, February 19, omitted to carry out a revolution in his favour and the Army Council also omitted to "go over the top" (as Repington, on February 11, exhorted them to do), that General Robertson abdicated and took up the new command to which he had been appointed. Sir William Robertson sincerely believed his departure was a national catastrophe.¹

These various conditions, of which this great deceit is the greatest, at last emancipates all General Staffs from all control. They no longer live for the nation: the nation lives, or rather dies, for them. Victory or defeat ceases to be the prime interest. What matters to these semi-sovereign

¹ See his letter, dated Feb. 25, to Repington, which I have set out in Appendix A. See also his curious letter, dated Feb. 19, 1918, written from the War Office, and quoted in full in the issue of the *Morning Post* of Feb. 22, 1918, p. 6, column 7: "I have done what I have done in the interest of my countrymen," he says.

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corporations is whether dear old Willie or poor old Harry is going to be at their head, or the Chantilly party prevail over the Boulevard des Invalides party. So much is this the case that two branches of a staff can get more hostile to each other than to the enemy, and, for example, at the Grand Quartier-Général, Intelligence and Operations spent their time thwarting each other. The Central Powers (as can be seen very clearly from Count Czernin's *Memoirs*) suffered from these conditions even more than the Allies: the German General Staff treated Emperors and Chancellors as if they were valets, claimed to control everything, even the birth-rate, and ruined their country by overriding Bethmann-Hollweg in the winter 1916-1917. "The misfortunes of Germany and Austria," says Czernin,¹ a temperate judge, well placed to see things as a whole, "arose from the acts which the military party imposed upon the Government." Bernstorff, the able German Ambassador in the U. S. A., also attributes the failure of Germany to its soldiers, who ought to have been kept "more thoroughly within bounds, just as they were by

¹ See *In the World War*, by Count Ottokar Czernin (Cas-sell, 1919), and *My Three Years in America*, by Count Bernstorff (Skeffington, 1920).

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Bismarck." But tough and slippery as they might be with us, Mr. Lloyd George was more so, and kept war a function of politics, and victory as the end of war.

Before the campaign of 1918 began, of the plan of campaign which may be attributed to Mr. Lloyd George, Foch, and Wilson, one part had been published to the world certainly with the hearty approval, and very probably at the instigation, of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Robertson; the other half had been nullified by an intrigue of which the French Commander-in-Chief was the author, and the British Commander-in-Chief the instrument, and to which the other leaders of the Alliance assented or were compelled to assent.

Meanwhile in front of our line the mightiest army ever assembled by the mightiest military nation of our age, and perhaps the mightiest army any nation has ever put forth, was preparing to attack; commanded by idolised, and hitherto invincible, chiefs; exultant over its fabulous victories in the East, where its colossal adversary lay shattered and dismembered; elate with hope, though with a veteran hope, sobered by years of struggle against great odds, and no longer fresh and gay as during the first intoxicating weeks of the

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war; confident that with one last and collected effort they could repay themselves for incalculable sufferings and losses, and lay the world at their country's feet. On March 1, the day before Haig wrote his letter destroying the General Reserve, a German General, Von Morgen, met Hindenburg and Ludendorff at the Grossen Haupt Quartier, then at Kreuznach. Hindenburg said to him jubilantly—

“The drama is nearing its close; now comes the last act.”¹

¹ See *Meinen Truppen Heldenkämpfen*, by General-lieutenant Curt von Morgen (Berlin: Mittler, 1920).

III

THE BATTLE OF ST. QUENTIN

III

THE BATTLE OF ST. QUENTIN

THE Allies had gone back to the position in which they had been during the preceding autumn, and the consequences their three leaders—Mr. Lloyd George, Sir Henry Wilson, and Foch—had rightly anticipated and feared from that position unrolled themselves at once, and in an aggravated form; aggravated because only one part of their military plans was left intact—the extension of the British line. This portion of their design was sound, even advantageous, if connected with the Executive War Board and the General Reserve. It was calculated to draw the enemy to where we could hit him best, and it did draw him; but though the reserve was never formed, and the Board never had any functions, the British line remained extended; and there from its extremity at Barisis northwards to Gouzeaucourt, lay our Fifth Army under Gough, composed of only fourteen infantry divisions and

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three cavalry divisions, strung out over 42 miles, on an average front of 6750 yards to each division; this was (for the British army) very thin. The Third Army, Byng's, immediately to the north, had one division on every 4200 yards.

While within the apex of the great angle formed by the front Ludendorff was concentrating his reserves, a mass of manœuvre of eighty divisions, the Allied line near this apex, the French running along the Aisne, and the British facing St. Quentin, had not the support of even the most moderate number of divisions within reach. The reserve divisions of the Allies, as the map at the end of this volume shows, were scattered everywhere on no evident principle, even to the civilian eye, except that of trying to be strong everywhere, with the result of being really strong nowhere. Gough's army, in front of St. Quentin, was helpless, as can be seen. But if Ludendorff's mass of manœuvre had rolled south instead of west, the French were hardly less so.

Early in March orders were issued to Allenby to advance, and he at once proceeded to execute them. Our Eastern attack began.

The Germans also prepared their onset. The German divisions from the East were still flowing

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into France in March, but had at the beginning of the month not yet risen to the level of the Allies. On March 13, Ludendorff had 186 divisions at his disposal, of which 79 were in reserve; this gave him 1,370,000 rifles and 15,700 guns. But the 167 Allied divisions (58 in reserve) gave them 1,500,000 rifles and 16,400 guns.¹ They still had the odds. On March 21, Ludendorff had 192 divisions, of which 85 were in reserve; this made him equal in rifle strength, but perhaps still inferior in guns.²

On the night of Wednesday, March 20, the villages of Picardy within the enemy lines rang all night with the lovely triumphant German battle-songs which the Germans sang, in spite of strict orders, as their hosts marched up in the dark for the last, the Emperor battle; and early on Thursday, March 21, the innumerable multitude of

¹ These figures have been questioned. They are, of course, the figures agreed by the French and British Intelligence. As such they were furnished by the War Office to the War Cabinet, and the historian will find them recorded in the Minutes of the Meeting of the War Cabinet held on March 13.

² The figure 192 is to be found in the Summary of Intelligence of G.H.Q., No. 446, dated March 22. The Report by the War Office to the War Cabinet that the forces were equal will be found in the Minutes of the 371st Meeting of the War Cabinet held on March 23.

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Ludendorff's immense mass of manœuvre flung itself against the southern portion of the British army like the sea against the shore. The battle began "with a crash," as Ludendorff says, against the Fifth and part of the Third British Armies; 64 German divisions, a total higher than the whole British army of 57, were set in motion against this sector. On that first day of battle, against two-thirds of the line held by Gough's 14 divisions, 40 of these 64 German divisions were set in motion; and against one-fifth of the line held by him, Von Hutier brought off his Riga manœuvre. On the Wednesday this sector had had 4 German divisions in line; spread fan-wise behind them, with the furthest tip of the fan 40 miles away, Von Hutier had 19 other divisions. These were brought up in the night between the 20th and the 21st of March, and the whole 23 were swung against a front, just in front of St. Quentin, of 3 or 4 British divisions.

On the first day the casualties of the Fifth and Third British Armies were estimated at 40,000; but Gough, though his line was badly dented in three places, was by no means broken. The Germans were still "firmly held in the battle zone." The British troops, as the German communiqués announced, had resisted with their "usual tenac-

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ity." But no soldiers could struggle against this avalanche of numbers for ever without being relieved or receiving reinforcements. All Gough's divisions had been engaged on the Thursday. Now Haig and Pétain's armies were equal to Ludendorff's, and our Fifth Army the weakest part of the line. If their dispositions were such as to afford proper support to Gough, their dispositions, and they themselves, and their plan, were justified; if not, condemned. This result, in a defensive action, must be the test. This help could come either from the British or French.

The Despatches of Sir Douglas Haig are written in a style very different from his own, as it appears in his personal communication to the War Cabinet and the Supreme War Council, to which the historian of the war is again earnestly referred. They look like the hand of the professional propagandist, and are far from candid.¹ They omit the most important facts. One is that Gough learned on Thursday, after appealing for help to G.H.Q., that he was not to expect any British reinforcements for seventy-two hours, that is until Sunday

¹ Rumour—by no means unreliable in so small and intricate a body as the General Staff—names quite different authors, and is corroborated by the evidence of style.

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morning¹; that it would not amount to more than one division; and that the second instalment would be another division which would reach him Wednesday morning. This the Despatches omit. Another fact is that the first British reinforcement to reach Gough was the 8th Division, which only came into action Sunday morning. This the Despatches omit. Another fact is that Gough from Thursday, March 21, when the battle began, to Thursday, March 28, when he ceased to command an army which had ceased to exist, never received any other British reinforcements than this single division. Some units of the 35th Division did indeed come to his help on Sunday afternoon, but were transferred to Byng's Army on Monday. This the Despatches omit. Another fact is that not only were no general directives issued to Gough before the battle, but that during the whole week of the battle he received no orders or directions from G.H.Q. at all, and had only one or two communications with it: he was left almost entirely to himself, and to act on his own initiative. This the Despatches omit. But their language not only omits: it also suggests. "It became both possible

¹ See Appendix C, "General Gough's Confidential Report."

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and necessary," the Despatches say, "to collect additional reserves from the remainder of my front and hurry them to the battlefield"; also, "my plans for collecting reserves from other parts of the British front were put into immediate execution." This is a stirring picture: the British reserves springing to arms and hurrying into battle. But so far as the Fifth Army is concerned, it is mythical. A single division arrived in a week. And these plans, whatever they were, and if they existed at all, must be most curious. For this single division, coming to assist troops fighting on the Somme, had to be brought all the way from St. Omer. The plans that can produce such a result must be worth publication, and should not be left to moulder in obscurity. Even the second instalment promised on Thursday 21st, and due on Wednesday 27th, never came. Haig refused to send any troops south of the Somme, where the remainder of the Fifth Army were then fighting. Gough was just abandoned.

Then there were the French—Pétain with his ninety-seven divisions. Pétain, of course, according to the joint plan of operations, Sir Douglas's own plan, was not bound to give any help at all, for the attack was on our extreme right; besides,

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by his verbal agreement, he was not bound, whatever happened, to afford us any assistance for the first three days of the battle. "On different occasions as the battle developed," says the Despatches "I discussed with him the situation and the policy to be followed by the Allied army." This is a courteous expression of a disagreeable fact. Pétain did not stand on his rights, and British G.H.Q. and the Grand Quartier did begin discussing how many French divisions Pétain would give, but Pétain maintained that this was not Ludendorff's main attack, which was to be towards Rheims, where a violent preliminary bombardment had taken place. This feint of Ludendorff was, of course, meant to divide the two wills which were opposed to his own, and it did. On Saturday morning the two Commanders-in-Chief were still arguing, and Pétain had got no further than granting three divisions. General Clive, head of our Military Mission at the Grand Quartier-Général, expressed their usual relations very happily. Clive said, "Haig and Pétain were like two horsecopers, one of whom is prepared to give more than he offers, and the other to accept less than he asks,"¹ and

¹ He said this to Repington. See Repington's *Diaries*, Oct. 8, 1917.

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this relation they maintained even during the battle. Meanwhile, on Friday, the front of our Fifth Army had given way under the pressure of the enormous masses in front of it, and Gough, who so far had received no reinforcements of any kind, British or French, gave the order to retreat, necessarily bringing back the Third Army with him. Mr. Lloyd George, at the Saturday meeting of the War Cabinet, expressed his regret over the General Reserve so bitterly and emphatically that the secretary made a record of it.

During the night between Friday 22nd and Saturday 23rd a single French division, the 125th, arrived on the battlefield without guns and fifty rounds of ammunition a man only. They had marched far and fast, and with a few gallant companies from our 18th Division, counter-attacked (with no success) on the Crozat Canal at 6 A.M. on Saturday. With it was the 1st French Cavalry Division, which seems subsequently to have been dismounted and amalgamated with it. They were the first reinforcement to reach the Fifth Army. This the Despatches omit, but take refuge in their unfailing magniloquence. "As the result of a meeting held in the afternoon of March 23," they make Sir Douglas say, "arrangements were made

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for the French to take over as rapidly as possible the front held by the Fifth Army south of Peronne, and for the concentration of a strong force of French divisions on the southern portion of the battle-front." At the hour when these arrangements were made, the "strong force" amount to this one tired and almost unarmed division. But Ludendorff did not wait on these arrangements; Von Hutier's army had been sweeping forward during Friday and the morning of Saturday, driving before it Gough's army, which was losing its cohesion more and more. At midday on Saturday the Germans had found a gap at Ham and crossed the Somme; so that the sector the Allied Commanders decided on Saturday afternoon that the French should take over had already been occupied by the Germans when the decision was taken. Only the "usual tenacity" of the British troops had kept Von Hutier till Saturday evening reaching the objectives assigned to his troops for Thursday evening.

The Despatches never analyse the composition this "strong force of French divisions" was to have, nor mention the date of its arrival. This is left conveniently vague, and the battle thus no less conveniently unintelligible. The Despatches do not mention the arrival of the 125th French divi-

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sion on Saturday morning, and units of the 9th and 10th on Saturday afternoon; that only the 62nd French division and elements of the 22nd arrived on Sunday; that only the 133rd French division arrived on Monday; that only the 35th Division arrived on Tuesday; and that only the 56th, 162nd, and 166th arrived on Wednesday, March 27.

Thus, during this week of continuous fighting, when we were attacked by the whole German army, only ten French divisions came into action, and then, in General Gough's own words, "without their guns, their transport, or any sufficient signal or staff organisation," and probably incomplete. This is the "strong force" of the Despatches, and these the moments of its arrival. The published French official accounts conceal these precise numbers and dates no less than the British, and for the same reason. Given the numbers engaged, this assistance is so small and tardy as to be almost useless. Therefore the scheme of co-operation between the two commanders was such that the German army was able to engage the British army, about a third of its own size, almost quite alone for a whole week. This condemns their leadership, and this is the reason these numbers and dates are unpublished.

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If a look is taken at the map, and the scattered distribution of Pétain's reserves in the third week of March,¹ it is surprising that even this number were able to reach the battlefield. This assistance would have been smaller and later still but for the headlong ardour with which the French army and divisional commanders hurled their troops into battle as soon as they could get them to the battlefield, and the energy with which the French transport organisation poured them on to it. The French generals rushed on to the battlefield almost alone. On Sunday morning, Humbert, who was to command a French army, burst into Fifth Army Headquarters. Gough said to him—

“I hope you are bringing me an army.”

Humbert replied—

“I am, but I have only got my standard-bearer with me.” (“Je n'ai que mon fanion.”)

This help was much earlier than had been considered possible on the first day of the battle, when Gough seems to have thought that, after the Saturday instalment, Tuesday would be the day on which the second instalment of French divisions would reach him.

The error in the G.H.Q. map that came to Ver-

¹ See Map at end of book.



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sailles, on which the French reserves, actually near Rheims and the Aisne at the outset of the battle, were marked as being near Paris, is most curious. For if Pétain had intended to deceive Haig, this is exactly the trick he would have practised: he would have got him to believe the French army were taking risks so as to be in a position to help him, while in fact the French army was taking no risks but putting itself in a position where it could give no immediate help to Haig. If this is the case, Pétain first used Haig to get rid of Foch's superior command; then induced Haig to enter into the necessarily disastrous agreement of February; and lastly duped him in the execution of it.

If either three or four divisions, French or British (and not much in a battle where more than 350 divisions were on that front on both sides), had reached Gough on Thursday, March 21, he might have been safe. This small figure was only reached on Sunday, March 24, more than three days after the beginning of the attack. If six divisions had reached him on Thursday, March 21, he would certainly have been safe. This figure was only reached on Monday. This is the opinion of General Gough himself, expressed a considerable time after the writing of his confidential report.

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According to Foch's projected concentration of the General Reserve, more than twenty divisions would have massed near Amiens and north of Paris, within easy proximity of Gough.

Thus during the week-end the Germans drove on towards Amiens, pushing before them the shreds of Gough's army; if they reached Amiens the British and French armies were separated, for no real communication could be established between them on the lower reaches of the Somme below Amiens. Once separated, Ludendorff could take breath, and fling his mass of manoeuvre of 100 divisions against each separately and in turn, either the reduced British pressed against the Channel ports, or the French with a vast front to cover.

During the week-end, therefore, at London, Paris, and Versailles, disastrous events were discussed and desperate resolutions taken; measures for the evacuation of Paris were considered; late on Saturday night, Clemenceau telephoned to the President of the Republic to get ready to leave Paris, with the rest of the Government, for Bordeaux. Clemenceau loudly declared he would fight to the Pyrenees, and calculations were made whether it would be possible to re-embark and save

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the remainder of the British army. But however determined their statesmen might be, the two nations might have refused to make a further effort, and the fortitude of one might not have endured the loss of their capital, or the patience of the other the destruction of their great army. The loss of Amiens might involve the loss of the war; everything hung upon it. Victory, therefore, was again within the grasp of the Germans.

Ludendorff proudly says the Germans at St. Quentin did what no one else had done in the war. But even the Germans must be given their due, and he understates his own achievement. After resisting for nearly two years the attempts of Allied armies almost twice their size to break through their front, the Germans themselves broke through the Allied front with a bare equality of forces, and this with a plan of operations that was very faulty, and ought to have proved fatal. During the week the German Emperor gave Hindenburg a decoration that has only been given on one other single occasion in Prussian history, to Blucher after Waterloo; perhaps St. Quentin was the greatest German victory of the war, and their greatest military operation.

It is certainly the greatest defeat we have ever

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suffered in our history, measured by any standard. For in the month of March, 1918, in ten days' fighting, we had in casualties 8840 (eight thousand, eight hundred and forty) officers and 164,881 (one hundred and sixty-four thousand, eight hundred and eighty-one) men.¹ This almost reaches July, 1916, the first month of the Somme battle, which has the record in the war for casualties in a single month with 8709 (eight thousand, seven hundred and nine) officers and 187,372 (one hundred and eighty-seven thousand, three hundred and seventy-two) men. Ludendorff, however, did not stop bleeding us, and in the next month, April, 1918, he inflicted losses on us of 6709 (six thousand, seven hundred and nine) officers and 136,459 (one hundred and thirty-six thousand, four hundred and fifty-nine) men, and in May, 3452 (three thousand, four hundred and fifty-two) officers and 65,597 (sixty-five thousand, five hundred and ninety-seven) men. Never before, not during even the first three months of the Somme shambles, have Englishmen been slain at such rate and on such a

¹ Strictly speaking, these are our casualties for these periods on all fronts, but all except the smallest portion were in France. The historian will find them in the Statistical Abstract of the War previously referred to.

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scale, and at the end of it, in June, the remainder were still on the brink of ruin, from which only their "usual tenacity" had saved them.

The prognostics of Sir Henry Wilson and Foch in the preceding autumn had been fulfilled as if by programme. The Germans, impelled by a single will, had in turn endeavoured to crush the separate armies of the Allies, the Italians at Caporetto, and the British at St. Quentin, and very nearly succeeded. The system of three independent Commanders-in-Chief had been disastrous on the defensive for just the same reason they had predicted, that the help which one Commander-in-Chief would give a colleague in danger would be either insufficient or too late, or both, and could only be decided by a superior authority superior to them all. From the first week of March, when the plan of a General Reserve was abandoned, Gough's army was doomed, given the actual disposition of the reserve division of Pétain and Haig, as the map shows. During the fortnight that preceded the battle no one on the immediate staff of Foch had any doubt that a catastrophe was inevitable, and Foch himself told the Supreme War Council so on March 15 in London. The future historian of the war can easily satisfy himself of

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the accuracy of this forecast. There are two documents, short and simple, which for this, as well as every other battle of the war, tell the story of the engagement at a glance: the position of the Allied divisions and the Diary of G.H.Q.; these are worth for any battle all the mountain of documents that exist. The positions for March (which can be seen in the map at the end of this volume) show the Allied reserves were so disposed that they could not reach Gough in time to save him against such an avalanche, and the Diary of G.H.Q. that they did not.

Ludendorff to this day does not understand his success, and attributes it to surprise. But there could not be a battle in which there was less of the unexpected. As Mr. Lloyd George has already told the world, the British staff at Versailles had worked out the attack exactly as it took place, except that they placed the main point where the Germans would try and come through a little farther north. This accurate estimate was in the main due to Sir Henry Wilson. He had formed his staff so as to admit of two distinct branches. One branch was Allied, the other Enemy, and it was the duty of the Enemy branch to "get into the Germans' skins," and to study the attack from their point of view. The direction of the coming attack

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was thus gauged within a few miles, and its volume within a few divisions. The conflict between these branches was known as the "war game." This war game was also played out before Robertson, and afterwards before Haig. Robertson asked a number of questions, all of which were answered, and left looking very annoyed at having such disagreeable ideas as an attack of this kind forced upon him. Haig spoke only once: he asked—

"What is the meaning of anti-tank defence?" and left in the same unbroken silence. There was only one error in these calculations. By the rules of the war game, Ludendorff ought to have had Amiens; there was one factor in the problem which the director in the game, General Studd, had not put quite high enough, the proud obstinacy of English troops, however foolish their leading. These anticipations were a reckoning from probabilities, made in January. Ludendorff has published his account of the long internal debate in his own mind, before he adopted his plan and took consequential measures. But as fast as he took those measures, Foch discerned his plan in February.¹ As the spring approached the prognostics

¹ I was interpreter and secretary to the Executive War Board on all sittings. On reading Ludendorff's *Memoirs*, I

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had grown more precise still. General Cox, of G.H.Q. Intelligence, not only gave the exact area of the attack (a portion of the German line which was lying hushed and motionless while the whole of the rest of it flared up with raids and artillery preparation), but tipped the exact date "on March 20 or 21." The German strength was, of course, known exactly, and its disposition roughly. Even the result was not a surprise to some of the very few who knew the Allied dispositions as shown in the map.¹ It did not need particular genius to do so, as any one can convince themselves by looking at it and imagining a mass of eighty German divisions in front of Gough's army.

It might have been far otherwise. The "terrible blow," as Major Grasset calls it, which Foch inflicted on the Germans at the Marne in July, 1918, might just as well, and perhaps more effectively, have been dealt on the Somme in March. When in

am struck by the accuracy with which Foch was reading his mind in February. On one point only were Foch and Weygand out. They were always nervous about an outflanking movement through Switzerland. Weygand always spoke anxiously about the great railway junction at Ulm, constructed for the purpose of suddenly switching masses of troops to any part of the Rhine.

¹ See Map at end of book.

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June Ludendorff crossed the Aisne and prepared to cross the Marne, Major Grasset says that Foch, then Generalissimo, and with power to do what he willed, "divined the error the enemy would make," and massed his reserves in the "wooded hills of the region of Compiègne—Villers-Cotterets," that is to say, to the north of Paris. He points out that it was an irretrievable mistake of Ludendorff's to cross the Aisne with a "master of manœuvre" like Foch in possession of these wooded hills. But Ludendorff had committed no less an error in March (and Foch had anticipated it), when he pushed across the Somme. If Foch had been allowed, as he intended, to concentrate the bulk of his General Reserve in these same wooded hills of Compiègne, a mass of Allied divisions, issuing from them, would have fallen on the German flank in March with an even more fatal weight than in July. Foch in the summer only returned to his original March manœuvre, just as Ludendorff returned to his original error. Foch in the spring would certainly with his plan have stopped the charging German bull dead, and might possibly, with a single rapier thrust of consummate deadly elegance, have pierced right to his heart, and ended him, then and there, for ever. Or our 5th Army

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might perhaps have played the part the 5th French Army, under Berthelot, played at the second Marne, and by its very retreat drawn the enemy where the counter-attack could club and stun him more effectually.

After the March disaster the defeated Generals heard no recriminations. The true spirit of patriotism in defeat, that never despairs of its country, was shown both by the King and the War Cabinet who, with inflexible fortitude, telegraphed on Monday to our armies to encourage, to thank, and to congratulate them: Mr. Lloyd George, driven to desperate expedients by the scheming and bungling of others, boldly swept the home defences clean to send every man to France, and dared (as he ought never have been compelled to dare) to leave this island guarded only by a few brigades, so that he let Sir Douglas know he was to be sent 80,000 men at once, and 82,000 more within three weeks. The historian who wants to appreciate the energy and courage of the War Cabinet, and what a glorious pilot Mr. Lloyd George is in a storm, should consult its Minutes at this period.

Meanwhile, on the night between Saturday and Sunday, G.H.Q. and the Grand Quartier-Général resumed their adjourned debate, the subject being

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the size of the "strong force of French divisions" that was to come to our help. For now the dyke was burst, it began to break down everywhere. The cracks in Gough's line that could have been filled up on Thursday with a few divisions, had on Saturday become fissures, through which the German flood poured in, and increased the pressure on the whole of the receding and reeling line. Now on Sunday great gaps were appearing in the front of the Fifth Army, threatening ultimate disjunction, which could only be filled with great forces. On Sunday Sir Douglas wanted twenty divisions to reconstitute the line. Pétain had got as far as promising twelve; but he only had five on the battlefield, trying to take over the line on Gough's right, and mixed in a confused fight with what was left of our 3rd Corps. His divisions fought furiously as they saw their sacred soil slipping into the hands of the enemy, and villages as yet untouched by the long war breaking into flame, but they were insufficient, and they arrived too late. It was the essential vice in their own plan—separate commands and therefore separate reserves—that was overthrowing the Allied Commanders. Each, as the map shows,¹ had disposed his troops as if his

¹ See Map at end of book.

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own were the only Allied front, and none other existed, and one of the two was bound to suffer, especially the smaller of the two. Experience at last convinced Sir Douglas of what reasoning had been unable to persuade him. When in 1917 Mr. Lloyd George had made Nivelle supreme commander at the Calais Conference on February 27, Haig had simply repudiated Nivelle's directions on March 4 when he received them. When in 1918 Foch, as President of the Executive War Board, had been in reality made supreme commander on February 1, Haig again repudiated his directions on March 2. In each of these years unity of command had been frustrated by his refusals, resting on a character of iron tenacity and the most gentlemanly, attractive surface, and on a mind both obtuse and extraordinarily slow.¹ The Commander-in-Chief was a knightly figure, with all the bearing and temper of a leader, but on a very low plane of human intelligence, as elderly cavalry men sometimes are. Even on March 14, twelve

¹ Sir Douglas Haig certainly never protested at Versailles when the plan of campaign for 1918 was adopted by the Supreme War Council, but it may quite well be that he did not understand what was being done. My own impression of him during the discussion was that he entirely failed to follow what was being discussed

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days before, he had persisted in London in rejecting the scheme of the General Reserve, and therefore in effect of a single central command. But very early on Sunday, March 24, he telegraphed to London asking Mr. Lloyd George to come over and arrange for a single Supreme Commander. He had never been able to grasp that the system of double command might expose him to being forced to fight Ludendorff all by himself, and it was not till he had been doing so for three days, and the prospect of continuing to do so actually opened before him, together with the likelihood of being driven into the sea, that he submitted to unity of Command, and an authority superior to his own, for which Mr. Lloyd George had always striven.

A French writer who was in the publicity section of the Grand Quartier-Général has warned historians against accepting too credulously the official accounts of the grand État-Major, and against the "great business of attenuating the truth" he saw going on under his eye.¹ Attenuation is a good word, and we should be grateful to its inventor.

¹ G.Q.G., Secteur I, by Jean de Pierrefeu (l'Édition Française: Paris, 1920): "Cette vaste entreprise d'atténuation de la vérité, que j'ai vue s'accomplir jour à jour sous mes yeux."

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He knew how the facts were cooked, for he was in the kitchen. The German General Staff, even in its military publication, has continued to season and manipulate the original material till it is almost unrecognisable. Our official records, also, are not innocent of attenuation, and the Despatches, like the communiqués, may be classed among them. The own pen of Sir Douglas Haig has a most ingenuous, quite a schoolboy, style, and as far removed as possible from their deceptive and plausible cleverness. Our historians, like the French, need warning: the Cambrai Despatches, for example, crumble at one touch of one single authentic document, the Diary of G.H.Q.¹ These elucidations may be left to the researches of the historian and the judgment of posterity, which is perfectly just because it is perfectly indifferent. These enquiries and verdict will partly explain to our de-

¹ The historian can find the Diary of G.H.Q. for Cambrai in the Registry at Versailles. What the Despatches conceal about Cambrai is that the twenty divisions used in the attack between Nov. 20 and Nov. 29, were so handled that the signal success of the first attack could not be exploited. The Diary of G.H.Q. shows this. There our troops tore a great open rent in the German line, then as on several other occasions, but with no result, and therefore to no purpose. Hindenburg in his *Aus Meinem Leben* notes how often this happened, and is evidently puzzled by it.

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scendants why the Germans collapsed in France before the Allies in 1918, when the Allies were inferior or not much more than equal, and resisted during the previous years when the Allies were overwhelmingly superior. It is a fair conjecture, from their results, that Haig conducted our armies in 1916 and 1917 by the same methods as he did in 1918: only the campaigns of 1916 and 1917 being offensives, they could, like Cadorna's Isonzo attacks, be trumpeted as successes. But in the case of 1918 an earlier correction of these official fictions is required.

The Despatches on the battle of St. Quentin conceal the fact that the Fifth Army under Gough received little or no support, and by their language also suggest (without, however, any explicit statement), that it was reinforced, and therefore that it failed partly at least through its own fault. But this army was left unassisted and unrelieved, and, in a general sense, was left alone to meet the whole weight of the German attack and ultimately abandoned. This, the real fact, is to the discredit of the Commander-in-Chief. The Despatches, by their artful omissions and suggestions, and by their absence of encomium, tend to transfer the blame for this great defeat from him to the Fifth Army.

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But Gough's army deserved all praise; they fought with heroic courage and endurance against the greatest odds. Instead of the mis-estimate, and perhaps the reprobation, which this official account has cast on them, they deserve great honour and still greater gratitude, neither of which they have ever received. For their resistance should not only in itself be memorable as a splendid feat of arms, but it saved the Allied armies. As always in the war, the boundless devotion and self-sacrifice of England's humble sons redeemed every stupidity and every selfishness of England's exalted chiefs.

Between March 21 and March 29 (inclusive) a hundred German divisions came into action. G.H.Q. Intelligence admitted between eighty and ninety as identified, identification being a very stringent and exacting test, and the real numbers necessarily higher. But only thirty-five British and fifteen French had come into action.

The battle of St. Quentin may perhaps be reduced to these abstract terms. The two Allied armies, French and British, were together equal to the German army, but the German army was two or three times as large as the British. The conduct of the battle by the Allied commanders was such that the German commander was able with his

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whole army to assault the British army for a whole week without its receiving any substantial or opportune assistance from the French army, and such that the German commander, during the same period, threw into the battle at the decisive point forces twice as large as the Allied commanders were able to put in the battle at the same point. The objective of the German commander was a place where, if he could have reached it, he would have been able to separate the Allied armies definitely, and so subsequently crush them each in turn. This objective he just failed to attain, because the portion of the British army in front of it sacrificed itself to prevent him, and in so doing was utterly destroyed.

This defeat is the natural and regular effect of equally natural and regular causes, which always have been, and always will be, operative in war, and was not due to the weather, the Prime Minister, or the shortage of barbed wire, as many think and as others, mostly military sycophants, vociferously repeat to make them think it. It is commanders who lose battles, as it is they who win them. If they are to enjoy the glory of success, they must also bear the discredit of failure, especially if this failure cost the lives of two score thousand English-

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men in ten days.¹ The dead of the Fifth Army have not the voice, and the living have not the knowledge, to plead its case.

Whether Foch with the Executive War Board (which in practice could not help becoming an Inter-Allied staff under him) could outgeneral Ludendorff, is debateable, and must remain uncertain and undecided. Whether Ludendorff could outgeneral Pétain and Haig is both certain and decided. It is not debateable, because he did.

Other standards of Haig and Pétain's generalship exist. At equal strength the Allied defensive under their direction broke down before the German attack; in 1916, the Germans, not being more than half the strength of the Allies, could not be broken by the Allied offensive. Or again: Foch struck down the enemy at the second Marne and sent him staggering back to the Hindenburg line with forces weaker than his; for the numerical superiority that passed from the Allies to the Germans in March, 1918, did not pass back again to them till September, when the amount of American effectives in the field rose to about a dozen divisions. This gives Ludendorff's stature; it is not

¹ In the first ten days of St. Quentin many more Englishmen were killed than in the whole Peninsular War.

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high, but it must have been higher than that of the two opponents he overcame at St. Quentin. Or again: Ludendorff's attack could not have been more clearly foreseen if he had served on us a written notice of it, with full particulars; it requires no military knowledge at all to perceive, from the map, that hardly any dispositions of the Allies could have been better calculated to assist him in overwhelming Gough and reaching Amiens than those adopted by Pétain and Haig. The military student will surely come to consider St. Quentin as a model of what a defeat ought to be, a sort of classical example, with a complete perfection of its own; a flawless jewel of incompetence, surpassing even masterpieces of the same kind like Cambrai.

In answer to Haig's request Lord Milner and Sir Henry Wilson crossed over at once, and on Monday, March 25, met Clemenceau and Pétain and Foch at Compiègne; Pétain was there, for the Germans were pushing violently over the line of the Oise, the door to Paris, and had got one foot through this door, which Pétain was trying desperately to close. The British commander was absent at Abbeville, and Clemenceau vacillated between the views of Foch and Pétain. No agreement was reached, and on Tuesday there was another meeting at Doullens.

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While Lord Milner and the British generals held a meeting in the Mayor's room at the Town Hall, Poincaré, Clemenceau, and the French generals waited outside the Town Hall. "We walked up and down in that little square for more than an hour," said M. Poincaré later to Foch.¹ "You cheered us during this long interval by repeating to us that there was nothing to despair about, that we must make an unyielding fight for every inch of our sacred soil, and, at all costs, prevent the enemy wedging himself between us and the English." Clemenceau has also told us the story of that meeting.² On that "terrible day," he says, having known Foch many years but never seen him on the field of battle, "we learnt the stamp of man Foch is. He remained imperturbable and confident, for reasons which he deduced one from another with the rigour of a mathematical demonstration, and restored the courage of us all. He evidently believed the battle could be won, willed it, and was going to win it." They then all went up and joined the British, and a discussion on the military situa-

¹ In his speech at the reception of Foch in the French Academy.

² *Fragment d'Histoire*, III, by Mermeix (Ollendorf, Paris).

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tion took place. Haig declared he could hold the line as far south as Amiens, but no further, and insisted on a supreme commander. Pétain even now had only been able to bring seven French divisions in action, across the great gulf that now yawned between the two armies; it was uncertain whether it could ever be spanned. While this discussion was proceeding, Milner took Clemenceau (who was still fluctuating between Pétain and Foch) apart and proposed Foch as supreme commander. To Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Henry Wilson, whatever their shortcomings, we owe, the world owes, Foch.

When Clemenceau took Foch aside and offered him the supreme command he said to him, remembering the scene in London a fortnight before—

“You have now got the place you wanted.”

Foch answered angrily—

“What do you mean, Prime Minister? You give me a lost battle and you ask me to win it. I consent, and you think you are making me a present. I am disregarding myself entirely when I accept it.”¹

Foch was not asked to extricate two unlucky or

¹ “Il faut toute ma candeur pour accepter dans de telles conditions.” See Foch’s own report of this dialogue in *Le Matin*, Nov. 8, 1920.

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unskilful generals. He was asked to risk his whole reputation to save two commanders from the consequence of errors against which he had never ceased to warn them, but in which they had persisted; two commanders who, to evade measures Foch had proposed in their own best interest, and for our common security, entered into an intrigue that a meaner spirit could not have forgiven, and for which he has never even reproached them. If his success in supreme command gives the measure of his genius, his acceptance of it gives the measure of his magnanimity.

Von Hutier, according to plan, was due in Amiens on Sunday, but had been kept back by the "usual tenacity" of our troops, which (as Hindenburg says in his lately published *Aus Meinem Leben*) so often repaired the errors of their leaders.¹ On the Tuesday, however, the Germans, racing along the St. Quentin-Amiens Road, with their artillery and supplies left far behind, suffering from hunger, and with little strength left in them, were only 12,000

¹ We should do well to ponder Hindenburg's opinion of our High Command; it was such, he says in *Aus Meinem Leben*, that our armies never gave him any real alarm (as contrasted with the French). Whether right or wrong, there is no reason to think the old German warrior is expressing himself otherwise than sincerely.

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or 13,000 yards away from the town. The exact distance, therefore, within which the Germans came to winning the war may perhaps be exactly computed in yards; it is the space along this road which separated them from Amiens. The meeting at Doullens was not very sanguine of saving it, and Foch outlined his plans of defence in case Paris had to be abandoned, and the British armies were driven back to the coast. On returning to London, Sir Henry Wilson reported to the War Cabinet next day, not very hopefully, that the safety of Amiens depended on whether the French could collect sufficient troops there in time to defend the town. For between Amiens and the upper waters of the Oise, a space of front well over forty miles, Foch, when he took over, had nothing but the fragments of the Fifth Army, broken by six days' continuous unrelieved fighting in retreat, and seven French divisions,¹ breathless, hard pressed, and suffering heavily, a thin worn screen that a single German cavalry division would have burst, and no immediate help in sight but three French divisions due the next day. On Sunday Pétain had just thought it possible that the connection between the two armies might be preserved, but on Monday

¹ The 125th, 9th, 10th, 62nd, 22nd, 133rd, 35th.

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both he and Haig had given up hope and were preparing to retreat, the one to the sea and the other to Paris. This, as Foch has since said, meant the loss of the war.¹

The very words of the agreement signed by Clemenceau and Lord Milner seem to anticipate separation as inevitable: he was not made generalissimo of one combined army, his authority was to co-ordinate the action of the two armies.

Thus the two Commanders-in-Chief had resigned themselves to being parted, and to ceding Amiens to Ludendorff before it was in his hands. Not so Foch. As at the Marne, the more desperate the situation, the fiercer grew his determination and the more resourceful his ingenuity, as if his spirit, the higher misfortunes rose, could always rise to a still greater height. The same old gentleman, now nearly three-score years and ten, who in 1914 had snatched the race from the Germans in the last few strides both in Lorraine and Champagne, was again to do so in Picardy in 1918, always with the same calculating audacity. As at the Marne, he divined the point where the last thrust of which the exhausted enemy were capable would come, and

¹ "C'était la défaite," are his own words to describe this projected retreat. See the issue of *Le Matin* of Nov. 8, 1920.

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again risked all to parry it with the same desperate manœuvre.

He was only appointed towards the middle of the day on Tuesday. But at a quarter to five, a few hours after his appointment, he managed to get through to Debeney, now commanding the extreme French left, on the telephone: Foch now had authority to command. He at once ordered Debeney to take all his troops out of the line farther south on a front of six miles, risk leaving a gap there, and send them up in front of Amiens. Against these, on the Wednesday, the last effort of the spent German wave broke itself.

So Foch, as soon as he was given a chance, found in himself at once, then as before in 1914, the means of retrieving the faults and errors of other leaders, and so saved them, but only just, on the edge of ruin. Again, as in 1914, nothing less than the fate of the civilised world had for a few days trembled in the balance, and again he threw in the weight of his own indomitable will and turned the scale. Within six months of the day when he was given the apparently hopeless task of commanding armies defeated and pressed back to positions of the most imminent disaster, those same armies under his leadership were thundering victoriously at the

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gates of the Hindenburg line, the safeguard and the symbol of German domination, and the leaders of the invincible German hosts who had awed Europe for half a century and very nearly overwhelmed it, had decided upon unconditional submission.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

The Relations between General Robertson, General Maurice, and Colonel Repington

GENERAL (now Field-Marshal Sir William) Robertson was, from the end of 1915 to the beginning of 1918, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

General Maurice was, from the middle of 1916 till General Robertson ceased to be C.I.G.S., Director of Military Operations; thus he was General Robertson's chief Staff Officer and his inseparable companion.

Colonel Repington left the army many years before the war and became a journalist. He was the military correspondent of the *Times* till the end of 1917, when he joined the *Morning Post*.

The articles written by Colonel Repington in the *Times* have never been republished. They are almost models of their kind, clear, sprightly, telling, almost classical journalism: he has also lately pub-

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lished a book entitled *The First World War* (Constable & Co.), in the form of *Diaries* of the war, very inferior to his articles, both in candour and style. He appears in these *Diaries* as a man of extreme quickness and cleverness, with gifts which, if he had continued in his military career, ought to have carried him to the very highest place; but also as a man of morbid vanity and egoism, that at times almost take him out of the limits of sanity. The *Diaries* shed a great light upon the relations between this journalist and our General Staff when Robertson was at the head of it. The evidence as to the conduct of the war supplied by the *Diaries* and the articles of this journalist is worth examining.

I. RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR GENERAL STAFF AND REPINGTON DURING 1916 AND 1917

Robertson, the Chief of our General Staff, found sufficient leisure to see Repington twenty times during the year 1916 (*Diaries*—February 2 and 25; March 23; April 9 and 15; May 9 and 23; June 12; August 4 and 9; September 7, 11, and 27; October 3, 10, and 30; November 13 and 22; December 6 and 30). Most of these interviews took place at the

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War Office or at Robertson's residence; but he had enough time to go round to Repington's house (March 29 and April 9) to give him an interview; he is so indispensable that he sends for him (September 7 and October 10), and two or three letters written by Robertson are quoted. Evidently this journalist was indispensable to Robertson in winning the war.

From January to November, 1917, eleven months, the same close relations persist between the two; they had seventeen interviews (*Diaries*—January 10 and 12; February 3, 8, and 12; March 17 and 31; April 10 and 13; May 21; June 25; July 5 and 21; September 21 and 29; November 13 and 21).

Most of these interviews are not short or casual meetings. Repington's account of most of them covers page after page of his long book. It is difficult to summarise them, but this might be done by saying that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff regularly, about every three weeks, reports on the war to the journalist: he furnishes him with a methodical, detailed, and comprehensive survey of it from every point of view.

During the war a great machine of censorship, counter-espionage, and legal prosecution was clamped on to the population outside the Govern-

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ment service to prevent military information reaching the enemy. For example, in May, 1916, a man called Bright was found guilty of obtaining the secret by which a material of military importance was being manufactured in Sheffield, though with no proved intention of communicating it to the enemy; the judge sentenced him to penal servitude for life. Inside the Government service, whether military or civil, even more rigorous rules existed: the most trifling indiscretions, the chance mention of the most unimportant detail, involved the most serious punishments. Repington is, as his *Diaries* show, indiscreet by nature; as a journalist, he is besides indiscreet by profession. The following are a few examples of what the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who was in possession of all our essential military secrets, was telling him.

In February, 1917, he describes to him the situation in Russia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, and the working of the Derby system; in March, our position in France, "We should soon have forty divisions in France"; in April, the Mesopotamian situation again; in May, the results of his visit to France; in June, the decision to abandon the offensive at Salonika: ". . . all our troops in France will attack"; in August, all our casualties in France;

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in September, Hindenburg's plans and our own; the maps of the German defence; the state of our recruiting; the date at which Mesopotamian railways will be finished; and the whole Balkan situation; in October, the position of Roumania, and our Home Defences; in November, of our man power; and in December, the same again, and our whole Eastern situation.

In 1917 Robertson is no less loquacious. His disclosures about our man-power situation are constant: "There are sixty German divisions opposing us." At times he carefully goes over every theatre of war for Repington (May); in June, he tells Repington about the great French mutiny, one of the most closely kept secrets of the war. In July, Repington says, "I did not think that the choice of Gough for this operation was good. . . . Robertson was inclined to agree." He explains to Repington how we stand in aviation and the East and in Russia (September); and in November, "we studied Cambrai on large maps." Thus Robertson systematically disclosed to Repington all our essential military secrets.

Every technical adviser of a Government is bound to be silent about his relations to that Government; otherwise he could not be trusted as

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an adviser at all, for he could subject the Government to his will, or to the will of some one else. This rule of discretion is observed by civilians in the Civil Services to a degree very nearly ridiculous. But there is a still stronger obligation on a soldier; for outward, as well as real, subordination to a superior is the rule of his life. Without this framework an army would collapse. The following are some of the remarks the Chief of the Imperial General Staff was making about his superiors to this journalist, even when his superior happened to be a soldier like Lord Kitchener. In February, 1916, Robertson remarks he "hopes politicians will let him alone" (February 2); Robertson said, "He is not so pleased with Lord Kitchener as he was, and begins to think we shall not get on until Kitchener goes" (February 25), Lord Kitchener being not only his superior, as Secretary of State for War, but a famous soldier. About a Conference in France Robertson "complained bitterly that our ministers did not take the lead in the debates" (March 29). On April 9 Robertson confided to Repington, "It was three months since he had laid the whole situation before the Cabinet . . . nothing had been done . . . no good could be done with the present ministers. . . . It was useless



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to have a Secretary of State for War who . . . Lansdowne who was too old and indefinite. Balfour and Chamberlain no good" (April 9). A few days later Robertson tells Repington "recruiting is a farce," and both again, "What a Government and what a War Office" (April 15). Again, in May, Robertson declares to him "it is impossible to carry on with Asquith at the War Office"; and in September, "Lloyd George declares that we have been all wrong in our offensive." A little later and this was their dialogue: "I said I found it hopeless to teach the politicians strategy, as they could not understand. He was of the same opinion, and had told Lloyd George that the latter must take his, Robertson's, opinions without long explanations, because Lloyd George to understand would have had to have had Robertson's experience, and no amount of explanation could make up for the want of it." On October 3 Robertson was complaining to him that "such a lot of his time had to be given to the Secretary of State"; a little later that "his time was much taken up by having to explain every detail to the War Committee. Lloyd George was always holding him personally responsible." In November Robertson "grumbled at the Cabinet," and exclaimed, "What on earth is the War Com-

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mittee up to?" In December Robertson wrote to Repington that "he had had a hell of a week," and told him "the Cabinet have no clear ideas about anything . . . Milner is little help . . . they take up his time but do not take his advice . . . a little body of politicians was trying to run the war themselves."

In 1917 the tone of Robertson in the *Diaries* is the same. "He, Robertson, had been very firm. Lloyd George had resented his attitude." "The discussion had been twice put off by the Cabinet" (January). "One had to temporise with these politicians" (Robertson speaking), "in this manner time was gained." "He did not intend to lose the war by giving in to the politicians" (February). In April he tells Repington "he had had to fight for Murray before the War Cabinet." "The War Cabinet were really not helping him . . . they were not really placing the war first, and when they did discuss it they understood little about it." "The War Cabinet idea about Italy was preposterous . . . the manners of the War Cabinet had not altered" (June). At the news of a success this is Robertson's sarcasm: "The War Cabinet will think to-morrow they have won the war" (September); and when the Supreme War Council is estab-

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lished, "We talked over the Paris plan and are both contemptuous." Thus the sole and exclusive military adviser of the Government criticised it to an irresponsible person like Repington, and thus violated his duty to his superiors.

There is another sect of remarks to be culled from the *Diaries*. They are directed at our Allies. In 1916 Robertson was saying this sort of thing: "The French are no good for more than one more serious effort"; that he has dissensions with Joffre; that he hoped "to squeeze Joffre"; "The Roumanian strategy was rotten"; "There is no love lost between Russia and Roumania"; "Joffre is in trouble again"; "The French have not kept their promises." In January, 1917, Repington learns from him, "Briand has tried very hard to stampede our people" (January); and in March that Robertson "preferred Joffre to Nivelle"; in April that "the Russian position is rotten," and that he is "uneasy about French politics," which have no "stability." He expresses his scorn of Russia (May), and tells him in November that "the debacle in Italy is indescribable." Every Ally is dissatisfied with every other Ally, but every one feels it is indelicate to say so. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who should have set an example of loyalty to them,

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did not do so; he disparaged them to a man who was extremely likely to disseminate his words.

Maurice, his chief Staff Officer, was compulsorily retired from the Army in May, 1918, and having, like Repington, been compelled to leave the Army, he also, like Repington, became a journalist.

The offence for which the Army Council took disciplinary measures against him in May, 1918, was for carrying on an agitation in the Press; but from the very first this Director of Military Operations seems to have been Director of Press Operations as well for General Robertson. "Major-General Fred Maurice, the new Director of Operations," says Repington (August 16, 1916), "dined with me at the Savoy at 8. . . . He suggests that I should use this event as a peg on which to hang a comparison between the situation of May and August, 1916. We went all through the different points, but as these will be in the article when it comes out, it is unnecessary to refer to them here"; again (March 10, 1917), "saw Fred Maurice, who wants me to write about the question of employment of officers of the Old and New armies."

Maurice allowed Repington to use his office of D.M.O. as if it was Repington's own office, and

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was not behind Robertson in zeal. He and Repington "laughed a good deal about Lloyd George's description . . . of his visit to the front" (August 16, 1916). "Maurice and I are convinced that nothing will convince our politicians what war means" (February 20, 1917). "Maurice thought that we ought to have a chair at some University to teach budding statesmen the rudiments of war" (September 26, 1917).

Maurice has praised these *Diaries* of Repington as "among the greatest diaries of our literature."¹ Therefore Repington's account of his relations with Maurice should be true. Robertson has never disavowed Repington's account of their relations; besides, Maurice as a journalist is Robertson's champion, and bellows with rage at any criticism of him.² If Repington had misrepresented his own relations with Robertson, Maurice would not have lavished praise on the *Diaries*. Thus Repington's account of his relations with Robertson should also be true.

Repington cannot be blamed for these transactions. As a journalist it was his business to get information. His articles in the *Times* show what

¹ *Daily News*, Sept. 10, 1920.

² *National Review*, Oct., 1920.

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Robertson got in return. The articles are far superior to the *Diaries*: more genuine, because they have not been retouched to suit the subsequent course of events; more talented, because their bright clarion notes are not mixed with the jarring snobbery of the *Diaries*; more interesting and valuable, because the historian can find in them the ideas with which Robertson guided the war.

Repington proclaims the greatness of Robertson. Victory is anticipated because "Sir William Robertson has a free hand" (the *Times*, May 8, 1916). Everything was wrong till "Sir William Robertson came," and then, but then only, "we returned finally to the right paths" (August 24, 1916). Victory has been delayed but it is now in sight because we "are in a fair way at last, following the advice of competent soldiers, amongst whom General Cadorna and Sir William Robertson are in the front rank" (January 15, 1917). The first service which Repington rendered to Robertson was public adulation.

Repington preaches the ideas of Robertson. They are very interesting. Unity of Command is rejected. It would "risk upsetting everything and everybody by radical, untimely, dangerous changes" (December 18, 1917). The right strategy

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is "wearing Germany down" (November 24, 1917); and the right method is to raise more men, sixty divisions more, in addition to the seventy odd we already had. He comes back to this man-power question again and again: "Victory or defeat," he declares (May 8, 1917), "depends upon man-power, and nothing else stands between us and success." "Will the British democracies allow history to say that they have failed in courage and resolution" (August 11, 1917), by not loading themselves with an army almost as great as the German, as well as almost the whole naval and financial burden of the war. This was the very point of difference between Robertson and the War Cabinet, who presumed to think there might exist a less primitive strategy. Repington is used by Robertson to direct the pressure of public opinion against the Cabinet. For this end Repington spreads the fiction (though perhaps he is rather dupe than deceiver) that we are weaker than the enemy. If Robertson can get more men, we will fight, he says (August 11, 1917), "with something near an equality of forces." This, of course, was untrue: the Allies had long been overwhelmingly superior to the Central Powers. The Allied soldiers had never been able to use the very great preponderance the Allied politicians had

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given them. Thus the second service which Repington renders to Robertson is a press agitation in favour of Robertson's ideas.

Repington denounces Robertson's civilian superiors. He unintermittently criticises "amateurishness in the Cabinet and Defence Committee, the harassing and hampering interference of politicians" (February 8, 1916). "The Government allows . . . incompetent administrators to mishandle" the army (May 8, 1916). "The Cabinet of the war period can claim no merit . . . except that of letting things slide" (August 24, 1916). They suffer from the "hopeless incapacity of amateurs to conduct a business of which they know nothing" (same date). "It is known, of course, that every politician thinks he knows all about war" (August 25, 1916). "The politician is for ever fuming and fretting and trying to interfere" (same date). "Allied politicians would neither acknowledge the sphere nor appreciate the function of strategy" (July 15, 1917). "A party in the late Cabinet . . . no hesitation in assigning the main responsibility for the prolongation of the war to them" (same date). He refers to "inefficiency of our War Cabinets" (August 4, 1917). "It would have been better if Mr. Lloyd George had adhered

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to the facts" (November 17, 1917); and so on. Repington echoes the abuse Robertson poured in his ear, as far as the Censor would allow. His eloquent advocacy was intended to make our statesmen, in the mind of the public, responsible for Robertson's inability to conduct the war, an inability proved by the incontrovertible and quite plain fact that, as soon as he left, it ended in our favour almost at once. Thus the third service which Repington renders to Robertson was public denunciation of Robertson's superiors, the Cabinet, for the advantage of Robertson.

Perhaps all this evidence from the *Diaries* and the articles can be summarised in this way. Repington was the instrument, the very effective instrument, of Robertson and his assistant Maurice in the Press. Robertson criticised to Repington the Government of which he was the technical military adviser, and thus violated his duty to his superiors; disclosed to him all our essential military secrets; and disparaged our Allies to him. Repington's services to Robertson were public adulation: press agitation in favour of Robertson's ideas; and public denunciation of Robertson's superiors, to the advantage of Robertson. Thus the closest connection existed between them.

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II. ROBERTSON AND THE *MORNING POST* PROSECUTION

Repington's article, publishing to the world our military secrets for the purpose of overturning the Government, appeared in the *Morning Post* of February 11, 1918. He and the editor of the *Morning Post*, Mr. Gwynne, were convicted and fined at Bow Street on February 21. Now, Robertson had been present at every meeting of the Supreme War Council, and knew quite well that Repington had disclosed our military plans to the enemy. In his *Diaries* (February 26, 1918), Repington prints the following letter he received from Robertson:

February 25, 1918.

MY DEAR REPINGTON,

I shall return to London in about a week's time, after which I shall have a good deal of inspection work to do, but I will not fail to arrange a talk with you. My present feelings are that I am more or less retired from the Public Service, except so far as my own particular command is concerned. I am heartily sick of the whole sordid business of the past month. Like yourself, I did what I thought was best in the general interest of the country, and the result has been exactly as I expected

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would be the case. I am in no way surprised at the turn events have taken; in fact I felt sure from the first that they would be as they have proved to be. The country has just as good a Government as it deserves to have. I feel that your sacrifice has been great, and that you have a difficult time in front of you. But the great thing is to keep on a straight course, and then one may be sure that good will eventually come out of what may now seem to be evil.

Yours very truly,
W. ROBERTSON.

The meaning of this letter is not quite clear, and this is perhaps less due to a deliberate purpose than Robertson's inability to express general ideas, which is usual. But Repington treats it as a letter of consolation at his conviction, and reports that at his first interview with Robertson (March 15), after this conviction, Robertson said, "few, except Gwynne and I, had stood by him." In any event, this letter is too inimitably in the style of Robertson to be anything but genuine. From its text two sets of observations arise.

The first set of observations are these:

First.—That Robertson considered Repington to have been doing the work of a patriot in

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publishing the article for which he was prosecuted. For Repington is treated as having "done what he thought best in the interest of the country."

Secondly.—That he had acted nobly ("your sacrifice has been great") and rightly ("the great thing is to keep on a straight course"). Therefore Robertson congratulates Repington on his conduct, as the noble work of a patriot, and condoles with him on his conviction.

Maurice also writes (*Diaries*, February 24) that he has "been ordered not to talk to him about the war" (Robertson has left the War Office), but that "I have the greatest admiration for your determination and courage."

Repington and Robertson had interviews of the friendliest kind on March 15, March 25, April 3, April 11, May 10, July 20, August 15, October 25, 1918. Repington's behaviour did not diminish but increased the cordiality of their friendship.

The second set of observations, to which Robertson's letter dated February 25 gives rise, are these:

First.—Robertson writes as if he and Repington had been engaged in a common enterprise:

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“Like yourself, I did what I thought was best.”

Secondly.—Robertson writes as if it was rather an improper enterprise: “The sordid business of the past month.”

Thirdly.—Robertson writes as if this enterprise had started about January 25—“the past month”; the Session of the Supreme War Council in question in Repington’s article began a few days after January 25.

Fourthly.—Robertson writes as if the object of this common enterprise had been to upset the Government, but that it had failed: “The country had just as good a government as it deserved to have”; “The result has been exactly as I expected would be the case.”

Fifthly.—Robertson writes as if the publication of the *Morning Post* article had been part of this enterprise: “Your sacrifice has been great.”

Therefore this letter strongly suggests that during the previous month Robertson and Repington had been collaborating in a joint enterprise, called “sordid” by Robertson himself, of which the object was to upset the Government, and that the publication of Repington’s article had been part of

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this enterprise. This is the supposition which the language of Robertson's letter almost exactly fits.

A violent dispute had arisen between Robertson and the War Cabinet on the Versailles decisions in the second week of February. On Thursday, February 14, Mr. Lloyd George had decided to replace Robertson by Sir Henry Wilson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Repington's article disclosing the Versailles decisions and the military plans of the Alliance appeared during the second week of February, on February 11; he invited the House of Commons to withdraw their confidence in Mr. Lloyd George because he had participated in these decisions and formed these plans.

On February 5 the then leader of the Opposition, Mr. Asquith, had asked the Government what the Versailles decisions had been, but had been refused all information. Not knowing what they were, he could not make them the ground for attack on the Government. On February 12 the business of the House was to be the Debate on the Address, which always gives the Opposition the opportunity of attacking the Government on any ground it likes to choose. Repington's article, on February 11, gave Mr. Asquith the knowledge he required, and,

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armed with it, he attacked Mr. Lloyd George on February 12, but without success.

The Repington article, therefore, was, in fact, used inside the House of Commons against the Government at a moment when Robertson was quarrelling with the Government, and he was on the point of ceasing to be Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

III. REPINGTON'S INFORMANT

Who gave Repington the information about our military plans which he disclosed to the public, and therefore to the enemy, in his *Morning Post* article of February 11?

Repington has given an explanation in his *Diaries*. An account of the debate and decisions of the Supreme War Council was given to him, so he declares, by Clemenceau on February 3. This he reproduced in his *Morning Post* article. In his *Diaries* there is a long account of his interview with Clemenceau, and various opinions and items of information are put in the mouth of Clemenceau. But it is difficult to accept this explanation.

Here I must very reluctantly thrust myself forward. I acted as interpreter at the debate in ques-

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tion, as I did in nearly all inter-Allied discussions at Versailles while there. Any of the members of the Supreme War Council, or of the Military Representatives, or of the Executive War Board, and several other committees, would speak at full tilt for four or five minutes in English or French, and then halt. It was then my duty as the interpreter, with the help of a few hurried notes, at once to translate all they had said into the opposite language. This used to go on for hours, so that the interpreter more or less committed the whole debate to memory. As amendments in either languages, French or English, were introduced into the bilingual resolutions submitted, it was my duty as interpreter and secretary to alter the bilingual text; so that I became very familiar with the text of their decisions. As assistant secretary it was my duty on that particular occasion subsequently to draft the minutes of the meeting; and jointly with the secretary, I also had control of all these written records of the Supreme War Council, resolutions, minutes, decisions, and all copies. As assistant secretary, too, previously to the meeting, all the information on which the resolutions were founded had passed before me, and all documents returned into the joint custody of the secretary and

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myself. The part I played was, therefore, very subordinate and, if difficult, rather mechanical. But my knowledge of this debate and decisions (as of nearly all inter-Allied discussions) was not an impression acquired by hearsay, or as a casual hearer; it was an impression stamped into me by a process drastic and multiple in itself, and arduous and exhausting to me, and giving me a knowledge of it minute, complete, and profound, far greater than that possessed by any of the great Olympians (who never listened to each other with anything like the attention I was compelled to use), and checked by the possession of all necessary documents. This knowledge was still clear and exact when Repington's *Morning Post* article appeared on February 11, and even now it is not altogether effaced. This knowledge prevents me accepting his explanation.

This close pursuit and reproduction of a speaker's words also constitute a microscopic examination of his mind, especially when the same interpreter usually acts for the same people, and this study is also reinforced by reading at leisure documents drafted by these speakers. The speaker, however eminent, places his mind as if under a powerful magnifying lens for the observation of the inter-

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preter. I mention this because this almost involuntary study is the base of most of my opinions.

No doubt an interview took place with Clemenceau, and some parts of Repington's explanation look real, but as a whole the account can hardly be accepted as quite genuine, for two reasons:

First.—The views put in the mouth of Clemenceau, and the views expressed in the *Morning Post* article, are not the views of M. Clemenceau.

Secondly.—The items of information put in the mouth of M. Clemenceau, and still more the items of information divulged by Repington in the *Morning Post* could not be obtained from M. Clemenceau, but only from records of the Supreme War Council, which were not then in the hands of M. Clemenceau.

But the views attributed to M. Clemenceau and the views expressed in the *Morning Post* were the views of General Robertson; and particular copies of the records from which alone Repington could obtain his information were in the hands of General Robertson.

The evidence of this contention must necessarily be elaborate and detailed, and can hardly be set out here.

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While the Session took place at Versailles, Robertson and Maurice stayed in Paris; so did Repington.

When Repington was prosecuted, Maurice is mentioned by the Press as having attended at the police court during the opening of the case for the Crown.

Therefore, as it is difficult to accept Repington's explanation that he obtained his information from the French source he mentions; as the only possible source of his information was copies of the records of the Session of the Supreme War Council in the hands of General Robertson; as he expressed in his *Morning Post* article the views of General Robertson; as, in his letter dated February 25, Robertson uses language strongly suggesting that the publication of the article was intended to assist Robertson in upsetting Mr. Lloyd George, and it was, in fact, so used in the House of Commons; these considerations, taken together with the previous and subsequent relations existing between, form a mass of circumstantial evidence pointing with undeviating finger at General Robertson himself as having supplied Repington with the information he published.

If all Robertson's Staff Officers were as eager Press agents as his chief Staff Officer, Maurice,

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there could be no difficulty in doing so. Almost all the papers officially sent by the Military Representatives at Versailles to Robertson in London in December and January must have been seen by Repington, or numerous entries in his *Diaries* would be impossible; and they could not have been seen by him unless Robertson was willing they should be.

To this conclusion, so damaging to Robertson, converge the many forms of proof supplied, quite involuntarily, by Repington; it is Repington's destiny to give evidence, in the intoxication of his vanity, against the very party in whose favour he comes forward to testify.

If this supposition, that Robertson was the informant, seems shocking, it is no more shocking than the fact that Robertson approved of Repington's disclosures, both by his words and his acts. The difference in culpability between applauding and instigating such conduct is faint and shadowy, if it exists at all. The same censure applies to Maurice, who is so hardened in these practices, that even now he writes as if unconscious that disclosure of one's country's military plans to the enemy in time of war is wrongful, however obtained and whatever the object.¹

¹ See his article in *National Review*, Oct., 1920.

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IV. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

One more incident in the relations of Robertson, Repington, and Maurice, is worth mentioning.

On May 6, Maurice wrote a letter to the Press, which was published, and which accused the Prime Minister of being untruthful. It led the Army Council, on May 12, to place him forthwith on retired pay. On May 9, the Maurice letter was discussed in the House of Commons, which again supported Mr. Lloyd George, just as it had supported him on February 12 and 20, in spite of the Repington article. On May 10, the trio, Robertson, Maurice, and Repington, dined together (*Diaries*, May 10).

Repington does not record their feelings or conversation at this melancholy feast, but, by way of showing what I believe their motives to have been, I will imagine what it was.

They deplored that the Repington article had failed to upset Mr. Lloyd George in February: if it had, Mr. Asquith would again have been Prime Minister, and he never would have substituted Sir Henry Wilson for Sir William Robertson, as chief of the Imperial General Staff; they also deplored that the Maurice letter had failed to upset Mr.

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Lloyd George the day before: if it had, Mr. Asquith would again have been Prime Minister, and he might have dismissed Sir Henry Wilson, and restored Robertson. The text itself of the Maurice letter affords some evidence of this. He loudly disclaims acting with or for any one else, and announces that he speaks only for himself. But he protests too much. If this was strictly true, it probably would not have occurred to him to mention it.

Either of these two little *coups d'état* would have made Robertson Chief of the Imperial General Staff and Maurice Director of Military Operations till we lost the war, and satisfied the personal feud of Repington with Sir Henry Wilson.¹ These were the real motives, in the time of their country's extreme peril, of this trio, who still persist in addressing the public as if the spirit of military duty was incarnate in themselves and in themselves alone. Maurice in this respect is egregious. In spite of being compulsorily retired from the army for a breach of the regulations, he writes articles as an authority on the conduct becoming an officer.² Though his offence was the discussion of military affairs in the

¹ This personal feud and its origin, were fully discussed in an article in the *Observer*, in 1918.

² See *The National Review*, Oct. issue, 1920, p. 196.

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Press, he takes it upon himself to rebuke "subordinates at Versailles," among whom he knows by some extraordinary chance that "gossip was rife," for this indulgence.¹ His effrontery is sublime.

¹ See same article in *National Review*.

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Unity of Command in 1917

I WAS personally a witness of the events of the spring of 1918 in which Sir Douglas Haig declined to obey the decisions of the Supreme War Council. There is an almost exact parallel between these events and those of 1917, as given in the despatch of the French Prime Minister, M. Briand, dated March 6, 1917, to Mr. Lloyd George, and herein set out below.

This despatch is quoted in several French semi-official accounts, such as Major de Civrieux's *L'Offensive de 1917* (Garnier, Paris), and *Fragments d'Histoire*, III, by Mermeix (Ollendorf, Paris).

M. Briand does not set out Sir Douglas Haig's letter of March 4, 1917, to Nivelle; but this letter was evidently, from his analysis of it, confused and almost unintelligible. While Sir Douglas refused to obey the decisions of the Calais Conference, he evidently avoided any justification of this refusal by introducing irrelevant topics; in these respects

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it is exactly like his letter of March 2, 1918, to Foch and the Executive War Board. The historian who wishes to gauge the intellectual calibre of Haig (and he will never understand the war otherwise) should collect all his personal communications and memoranda with the War Cabinet and the Supreme War Council, and read them.

In one of the above works, *L'Offensive de 1917*, a French Military Attaché in London, Berthier de Sauvigny, is quoted as officially reporting a conversation of two hours between himself and Mr. Lloyd George, in Colonel Hankey's room in London on February 15, 1917: in it Mr. Lloyd George assures him of the eagerness of the War Cabinet for a single supreme command, though "the prestige of Marshal Haig with the Army and the English people make it difficult to subordinate him to a French Commander." The anonymous author of *Fragments d'Histoire*—who is, however, not very reliable—declares that after the receipt of this despatch of M. Briand, Mr. Lloyd George told the French he was not strong enough to compel Haig. This is what Briand asks for: "Le maréchal Haig doit être mis en demeure"; but it was certainly not done, and a compromise, dictated by Haig, adopted in London, March 13.

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THE DESPATCH OF M. BRIAND TO MR. LLOYD GEORGE:—

March 6, 1917.

General Nivelle has just communicated to the *Comité de Guerre Français*, the memorandum of March 2nd sent by Marshal Haig to General Robertson. This document gave rise, on the part of the *Comité de Guerre Français*, to the following remarks:—

On February 27, immediately after the Conference of Calais, General Nivelle sent a letter to Marshal Haig which reached him the same day, in which

1. He confirmed the plan of operations and the date of the offensive.

2. He asked for the orders given to the British forces.

3. He asked for the organization of the *État-Major* of the English Mission, the creation of which had been decided upon at the second meeting of the Conference of Calais. Six days later, March 4, Marshal Haig replied by a letter in which he merely stated:—

1. His opinion on the subject of the German repulse (*repli*) on the Ancre.

2. His hypothetical fears on the subject of a German attack in Flanders.

3. His doubts of the utility to the G.Q.G. Français, of the Organized Mission, and of the possibility of being ready to attack on the date set.

To this letter was attached a copy of the note sent by him to General Robertson to be submitted to the War Committee.

From this note resulted:—

1. The determination not to accept the decisions of the Conference of Calais.

2. The constant tendency to question again the plan of operations accepted by the Conference, where the chiefs of the English and French Governments were assembled, furnished with the full powers of the two Governments, and of their War Committees—a tendency all the more dangerous as the time for the offensive drew near.

3. A marked tendency to give up taking the initiative of the operations, manifested by making much of all that the Germans might do or plan, without reflecting that we might profit by the same advantages. For example: *1^{er} alinéa du A; 1^{er} du B, tout le D, enfin tout le F qui envisage au dernier alinéa.* The reduction of the British co-operation and even the abandonment of the plan.

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The general spirit of this document indicates a feeling opposed to the offensive.

The plan ascribed to the Germans of attacking in the North is possible, but rests on no certain basis; for that matter, one can make numerous hypotheses of the same sort in regard to all the points of the Front: Rheims, Soissons, Champagne, Lorraine, Alsace.

Only one real fact exists, which existed already at the time of the resolutions of Calais, and that is the repulse (*repli*) on the Ancre.

General Nivelle has decided in consequence—

1. That no change will be made, unless new events arise, in the plan of general operations.

2. That only the secondary attack on the Ancre, of which the end is partly attained, was suppressed, thus creating a release (*disponibilité*) of about 6 divisions which for the moment will be left at the disposal of Marshal Haig. The abandonment of this attack is calculated to strengthen the attack on Arras and to hasten its preparation, since there is now only one front of attack to provide with stores and munitions.

The repeated tendency of Marshal Haig to avoid (*se dérober*) the instructions given to him, to question incessantly the offensive itself, the plan of

operations, and that at a moment so near the time of execution, would render the co-operation of the British forces illusory, and make impossible the exercise of a sole command.

Consequently, Marshal Haig should be obliged, without further delay, to conform to the decisions of the Conference of Calais, and to the instructions given to him by General Nivelle.

It is important, moreover, that General Nivelle should have as soon as possible the use of a qualified intermediary between him and the English forces, in order to be advised of the disposition of these forces and to communicate his instructions to them. The *Comité de Guerre Français* urges that General Wilson, who has already acted in a similar capacity at the beginning of the campaign, be appointed to this position.

In case the War Committee should not see the way to remedy, without delay, the serious disadvantages cited, it would not be possible for the French Commander-in-Chief to secure unity of operation on the western front, and the French Government, to its great regret, could only deplore this situation.

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COLONEL CHARLES REPINGTON

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General Gough's Confidential Report

THE despatches of Sir Douglas Haig on the battle of St. Quentin conceal the fact that the 5th Army under Gough received little or no support, and, by their language, also suggest (without, however, any explicit statement) that he was properly reinforced, and therefore that it failed through its own fault. But this Army was left unassisted, unrelieved, and, in a general sense, was left alone to meet the whole weight of the German attack, and abandoned. This, the real fact, is to the discredit of Sir Douglas Haig. The Despatches, by their artful omissions and suggestions, and absence of any encomium, tend to transfer the blame for this great defeat from him to the 5th Army.

But the 5th Army incurred no blame. On the contrary, they fought with heroic courage and endurance against the greatest odds. Instead of the mis-estimate, and perhaps reprobation, which this official account has cast on them, they deserve great

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honour and still greater gratitude, neither of which they have ever received. For their resistance should not only in itself be memorable as a splendid feat of arms, but it saved the Allied armies.

My version of the events, especially the late and insufficient assistance we received from the French, as against the official version, was called into question by several critics when I published it. The honour and credit of Gough's Army seemed to me to be sufficiently important for me to produce my evidence. As to whether he was adequately supported or not, there could be no better witness than Gough himself. I therefore applied to General Gough for permission to publish extracts from his confidential Report on the battle, made for and sent to G.H.Q., and obtained his permission. The following are the relevant extracts:—

EXTRACTS FROM GENERAL GOUGH'S CONFIDENTIAL REPORT ON THE BATTLE OF ST. QUENTIN.

"The 5th Army consisted of fourteen Infantry divisions and three Cavalry divisions.

"Preparations:—

"It was evident before March 1 that a great attack was pending on the 5th Army.

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"I held several conferences with Corps Commanders in which the situation was clearly laid before them.

"It was pointed out that within a seventy-five mile radius of the centre of the army front lay some thirty to fifty German divisions, who could concentrate on the army by road and rail in three days.

"The utmost energy was urged on all corps to get on with the necessary defensive works of all kinds, and time for rest and training was reduced to a minimum.

.

"The Battle:—

"At or just before 5 A.M., March 21, a very heavy bombardment opened all along the army front.

"By 5.15 A.M. all corps received orders—'Man Battle Stations.'

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"Up to 8.30 A.M. no infantry action was reported, but bombardment was heavy.

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"Between 9.40 A.M. and 10.30 A.M. reports came in of hostile attacks.

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"Between 10.30 A.M. and 11.30 A.M. reports came in showing that the attack was general along the whole army front.

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"Between 11.30 A.M. and 1.30 P.M. it became evident that the hostile attack was being made in overwhelming masses along nearly all the army front.

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"In fact it was becoming evident to me about this time and during the afternoon, that I would shortly have to make a decision between fighting a decisive battle with the 5th Army or carrying out a delaying action, which, while inflicting heavy loss on the enemy, held him up as long as possible, but always maintained an intact, even though battered and thin line, between him and the arrival of the General Reserves, in the hands of the British and French Chiefs.

"I was aware that, from the British sources, I could only expect one division at a time, at intervals of seventy-two hours, and that the first to arrive could not be expected for seventy-two hours.

"The French division, after the first two, would not arrive any faster.

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“Such Reserves were bound to appear too slowly to enable me to maintain my whole front of forty miles for several days with the divisions at my disposal, when that front was being attacked along its whole front and when every division I possess was being hard pressed and would require relief in two or three days.

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“In the case of the French, these divisions would be arriving without their guns, their transport, or any sufficient signal or other staff organisation.

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“By nightfall, March 21st, the situation on the army front was as follows:—

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“Thus the Army front on the battle zone of forty miles remained intact except for three serious breaches and one minor breach.

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“The situation as the result of one day's fighting against immense odds and holding such a long line so thinly under the very adverse conditions of a dense fog, might have been considered very satis-

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factory if it had not been for the fact that very few Reserves were at hand to fill the gaps, to organise counter-attacks, or to sustain the struggle for six or eight more days, and that the losses had been severe.

“Friday, March 22:—

“This morning a thick mist again enveloped the battlefield, rendering all observation for more than fifty yards impossible.

“By 11 A.M. it became apparent that the enemy was continuing his attack as heavily as ever.

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“During the rest of the day heavy fighting continued along the whole army front.

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“In consequence of this situation, the exhaustion of the troops, the inadequacy of their numbers to hold seriously the length of front involved, and the knowledge that, except for one French division and some French cavalry in the 3rd Corps area, no support could possibly reach the fighting line before Sunday morning, the 24th inst., I decided on a further withdrawal behind the Somme.”

(This French division, of which the distinguish-

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ing number is not given by General Gough, must, I think, be the 125th, who arrived during the night and, in company with a few companies of our 18th Division, counter-attacked at 6 A.M. on Saturday on the Crozat Canal, but without success. The 1st Division of French cavalry seems to have been dismounted and amalgamated with it. These were the first French troops to take part in the battle, but were, I believe, without guns, and had only 50 rounds of ammunition a man.)

“Accordingly, the following Army Orders were issued by 11 P.M., 22nd inst.

.

“Information from G.H.Q. informed me that two French divisions and one French cavalry division might be expected about Noyon during the course of Friday night, 22nd inst., and the 8th British Division would be detraining at Nesle and west of it during Saturday and Sunday night.

“None of these troops could be expected in the firing-line, and then only gradually, till Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, when the first brigade of the 8th Division was able to take post along the line of the Somme.

“Information also reached me that the 35th

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British Division was to join me, but this was not due till after the arrival of the 8th.

“Saturday, March 23:—

“During the early hours of the morning reports arrived saying that the enemy had forced the passage of the Crozat Canal.

“During the day heavy fighting again continued along the whole of the army front.

“At about 4 P.M., 3rd Corps reported that the French troops were coming into action—one regiment, 9th Division, south of Flavy le Martel, and two regiments of the same division—to meet the threat on the left flank, in the direction of Golan-court; while the 10th Division was coming up still farther to the west and filling what was tending to become a gap between the 3rd Corps and the right of the 18th Corps.”

(Thus the first reinforcements of any kind that ever reached Gough were these units of the French 9th and 10th Divisions, late on Saturday afternoon, and the other French division mentioned before, which I believe was the 125th French Division.)

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"During the night of the 23rd-24th, the 8th Division commenced to reach the line of the river (*i. e.* the Somme), coming up as they detrained.

"Nothing in the way of a detailed reconnaissance or deliberate occupation of the position was possible; nevertheless, this division successfully got into position, an operation for which it deserves much credit.

"I may here say that in all the subsequent heavy fighting the division showed its fine spirit and good training to great advantage. It is doubtful, however, whether the junction with the 18th Corps was ever satisfactorily established."

(This 8th British Division was the first and only British reinforcement that ever reached Gough.)

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"Sunday, March 24:—

"During this day the enemy continued his pressure on the 3rd Corps and the French, who were now coming into this area. . . .

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"As the command passed, from this date, to the 3rd French Army, I do not propose here to deal further in detail with the operations of the 3rd Corps. . . ."

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(The new French troops coming into this area on Sunday were the 62nd and elements of the 22nd Division, besides those that came in on Saturday.)

"By 2 P.M. the right of the 8th Division had been pushed back west of Potte. . . .

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"During the afternoon of 24th and night of 24th-25th, some brigades of 35th Division arrived, I believe, and went into line north of the Somme under the orders of the 7th Corps."

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(After the 8th British Division, these brigades of the 35th Division were the only other British troops to reach Gough, but on Monday morning these were taken away from him, and passed under Byng.)

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"Monday, March 25:—

"Early on this morning the French Command, under orders of General Fayolle, took over up to the Somme."

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(Fayolle even then only had the 133rd French Division, which came into action on Monday,

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besides the French divisions that had been heavily engaged on Saturday and Sunday, viz. 125th, 9th, 10th, 62nd, and 22nd; not more than six in all, and these certainly insufficiently equipped, and probably by no means complete; on Tuesday, the French 35th, and on Wednesday the French 56th, 162nd, and 166th came into action: ten French divisions only, therefore, came into action during a continuous battle lasting one week.

During that week of continuous fighting, the only British reinforcement that reached Gough was the 8th Division.

These French divisions were the framework of the 3rd French Army under Humbert, and the 1st under Debeney, Fayolle being commander of the Army group.)

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